



THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF THE JAMES BOYS

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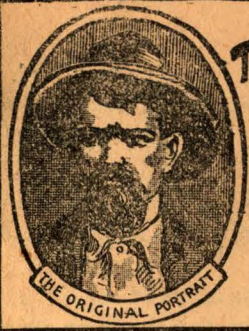
Price, Five Cents.

JESSE JAMES IN WYOMING

OR THE DEN IN THE BLACK HILLS



THE GREAT OUTLAW, JESSE JAMES, RODE BOLDLY FORWARD, A REVOLVER IN EACH HAND. HIS BROTHER FRANK WAS CLOSE BESIDE HIM.



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Price Five Cents.

JESSE JAMES IN WYOMING:

OR,

The Den in the Black Hills.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE BLACK HILLS.

It was midnight in the Black Hills. The spurs of the Great Divide towered in the distance.

The moon hung low in the heavens, like a ball of silver.

It whitened the rugged hills and made the black cañons look even blacker.

All was silence.

The very rocks took on ghostly shapes, and the ravines seemed filled with unholy echoes.

Suddenly a solitary horseman could be seen outlined against the sky. His magnificent horse stood like a marble statue upon the very crest of a bluff.

Horse and rider looked like a part of the vast panorama of nature.

And so they were, for they were Jesse James, the noted desperado, and his wonderful horse, Fleetwind.

The two together completed the picture. Horse and man were an invincible pair.

They had raced with death over and over again, and

thus far the grim enemy seemed in no danger of overtaking them.

As the daring outlaw sat silently upon his noble horse, he scanned with his eagle eye the black stretch of the cañon.

This cut between the rocks wound like a spiral thread. At some points it yawned like an open grave.

At others it seemed to be hemmed in by overhanging boulders.

As the noted highwayman gazed, he became satisfied that all was well.

The dark deed that he was about to perpetrate could be accomplished with ease if only the moon would hide its face at the right moment.

He gazed at the heavens as though he would command the orb of night, and the moonlight, falling upon his face, showed the black mask over his features.

A moment later he emitted a shrill whistle.

Like a flash, another rider appeared upon the scene.

It was the next most notorious outlaw in the world.

It was Frank James, Jesse's brother.

Both were magnificent specimens of physical manhood. The two stood still a moment and looked upon the scene.

Their mounts acknowledged each other's presence with neighs of pleasure.

Then Jesse James gave vent to a low curse.

It rolled from his lips like the muttering of thunder.

"The worst possible night for our deal," he growled, savagely. "The moon balks us! It is making the cañon as clear as daylight."

"It may go in after a while. See, there are clouds in the west, and there is still an hour before the cavalcade comes up the mountain," answered his brother.

"The moon is one enemy that the James boys will never be able to conquer. But, remember, Jess, that same old moon has served us many a good turn. Where would you be now if it had not been for the moon last night? You would never have seen that cursed detective's revolver."

"No, and then my body would be lying at the bottom of Bloody Gulch instead of his," laughed the outlaw.

"Who was he?"

"One of Pinkerton's men, of course. Do you know, Frank, I have a curiosity to know how many of those fellows we have sent to eternity."

"Well, I have not! I'm satisfied to know that we are still here. But, hark! Was not that a step? Some one is coming!"

The two desperadoes listened.

There was not a sound.

Jesse James slid from his saddle and put his ear to the ground.

A moment later he was at his brother's side, speaking in low, quick tones.

"Indians are approaching! I know the stealthy noises! Now, who can they be? Apaches or Utes? There are a few of each hiding in these passes."

"Why should they follow us? We are friendly with both. Jesse James has never stolen a penny's worth from them."

"Principally because they have never had anything for him to steal," laughed the outlaw coarsely. Then once more he mounted his horse.

"What shall we do?" asked Frank, without, however, showing a trace of fear.

"Nothing! Let them come!"

At the same time the great highwayman put one hand on the butt of one of his revolvers.

The two men waited.

They were listening intently.

Soft cracklings now and then in the bushes proved that some one was approaching.

Suddenly a mournful cry issued from a thicket a few rods away.

It was like the yelp of a wolf that had been wounded.

In an instant the James boys raised their bowed heads.

A laugh burst from Jesse's lips. He had recognized the signal.

"Black Wolf, our faithful henchman," he muttered, in his deep-toned voice. "What means the fellow? I did not expect him!"

Then, as accurately as possible, he imitated the signal.

At once two Indians crept from the shadows on the bluff.

They glided like phantoms through the moonlight and came close to the two riders.

"Is it you, Black Wolf? Well, what is your news?"

Jesse James leaned eagerly from the saddle toward one of the strange figures.

A few guttural words in the Indian dialect followed.

Then the outlaw nodded his head.

The other Indian finished the report.

He spoke in the usual Rocky Mountain lingo.

"Ther cavalcade is now roundin' Red Ash Bluff. A dozen riders in all. One a woman."

"Ah! Then we have timed them correctly."

"Ay! To the minute. Colonel Hart left his ranch at six o'clock last evening."

"And he has the gold?"

"Yes. His saddle bags are lined with ther stuff. Arrangements have been made at Oreville for shippin' it ter Cheyenne. Ther colonel has in his possession some twenty thousand dollars' worth of dust and nuggets."

"Which will be transferred to our possession within an hour, if our plans do not fail," said Jesse James, with a grim smile. "But it is high time to be getting our forces together."

As he spoke he straightened himself in the saddle.

His hawklike glance was once more sweeping the stretch of the cañon.

Black Wolf, the Indian, was acting strangely.

He moved here and there among the bushes.

He was on the warpath after some thing or some one.

His companion allowed the blanket to slip from his head as he gazed around.

It disclosed the features of Bill Nixon, a noted desperado.

There was not so much as a trace of Indian blood in him.

Frank James muttered a word of caution, and the fellow quickly covered his head.

As he did so, the moonlight glinted upon something that was stuck in his belt.

There was a flash of light.

The fellow drew his blanket over and covered the object completely.

It was a vicious-lookin' . . .

It was flanked on either side by pistols.

Suddenly an echo smote their ears.

The rocks immediately behind them were reverberating with the sound of hoofbeats.

Instantly the two blanketed figures shrunk back into the shadows.

At a word from their riders, the two horses dashed down the hill just far enough to be out of sight of any one coming up the mountain side.

Then they stopped once more.

The desperadoes began talking together, softly.

"Are Dale and Packer guarding the White Birch Pass?"

"Yes, and Apache Jim and Bink the Terrier are in the rear. Dole and Packer will fall in after the cavalcade has turned the pass. Then it is for us to head them off. The rest will be easy."

"It ought to be. We will be six to twelve. Those are better odds than Jesse James usually works under."

Frank laughed as he spoke.

"We shall need all our men to-night. You and I will hold up the cavalcade, while Packer and Dale capture the gold. Apache Jim and Bink will have their hands full with the girl and the horses."

"You mean to shoot down the riders?"

"It is the easiest way. Dead men tell no tales. Of course, no harm must come to the colonel."

"No, he is the goose with the golden egg. That vein on his ranch is worth at least a million."

"We'll get a deed to that before he gets his liberty. Or, at least, before his daughter gets her's. The colonel is a stubborn fellow, but he loves his daughter."

"Hark! What's that?"

"The Indians are coming! Now, why the deuce couldn't they keep still for a minute?"

"Black Wolf scents danger or he would not have followed us. Mark my words, Jess; he is about to give us a warning."

The crackling in the bushes grew louder every minute.

So, also, did the echoes of the hoofbeats of the horses.

"They're on the stone trail now. We'll lose 'em as soon as they strike the red clay stretch," muttered Jesse, as he listened to the echoes.

"That will serve to guide us, then. We will start as soon as we lose the echoes."

"How many pistols have you?"

"Four. Two in my belt and one in each bootleg."

"Here comes Nixon and the Wolf."

The Indians had stolen down the hill to their master.

Black Wolf, a genuine Ute, crept close to Jesse, and muttered something.

"Impossible!"

Jesse James nearly sprang from his saddle as he uttered the word.

A curse fell from his lips as an accompaniment.

"What is it, Jess?"

Frank had reined up close to his brother.

Jesse James lowered his voice.

"The Wolf here says that we are being shadowed. He claims that he can scent the presence of Pinkerton detectives."

"I told you so, Jess! Still, how can it be possible?"

"The Wolf seldom errs!"

The two highwaymen looked around uneasily.

The Indian glided away to a thicket near by.

"I am sure he is right! He always acts that way when an enemy is near," whispered Bill Nixon from between the folds of his blanket.

"Then I leave you and him to deal with them," said Jesse James, grimly.

"The colonel, with his twenty thousand in gold dust, is less than a mile away. Frank and I have only time to get to the Rocking Boulder."

"Do you attack them there?"

"Yes. So you and the Wolf can protect us. If we are leaving enemies behind, it is for you to keep between them and us."

"And give our lives for yours, I suppose," growled Bill Nixon, savagely.

"Certainly, if necessary! Are you not my slave? Your life for mine! Yes, a thousand times over!"

He put spurs to his horse and dashed down the mountain.

Frank James followed at his heels.

Bill Nixon looked after them.

He was white with fury.

Suddenly a howl from Black Wolf awoke the distant echoes.

Then the sharp crack! crack! of a revolver followed.

The Indian had fallen like a log in his tracks.

Bill Nixon waited long enough to see two forms drop softly from a neighboring tree.

They had reached the tree just too late to catch the James boys.

Nixon took to his heels and fled down the mountain side.

A perfect volley of bullets followed him.

"My life for his! Not if I know it!" he muttered, as he made a sharp turn as lightly as a feather and dropped into a ravine.

He was now out of the way of the whizzing bullets.

Thirty feet above him two athletic young men leaned over the yawning chasm.

"If he has gone down there, he has gone to his death," said one of them.

"What a pity that it was not the King of Desperadoes himself! Still, Jesse James must be taken alive if the thing is possible!"

"I do not believe it is! He swears he will never be captured! Just think of the brave men who have lost their lives in the effort."

"Detectives, you mean?"

"Yes, and county sheriffs. Why, every man holding a sheriff's job in the South and West has at some time headed a posse and chased those two robbers."

"Well, it is our turn now."

"Yes, and he is leading us a chase, all right! It's a pity we only succeeded in killing an Indian."

"Oh, I guess this white-livered son of a gun is done for, too! That makes a pair of them out of the way. I wish we could dispense with all of the James boys' henchmen as easily."

"I wish we could; but, hark, what was that!"

Crack! crack!

The echo came from the rocks above them.

Crack! crack! crack!

"Pistol shots, by Jove! The highwaymen are at it! Come on, Miller! We may be able to take a hand in the *mêlée*."

The two tore down the mountain side as they spoke.

As they reached a winding trail, they made even better headway.

Behind them loomed the interminable spurs and shadows of the Rockies.

Before them was the narrow defile that led from Golden City to Oreville, a mining settlement.

To go back meant to face the horrors of a wilderness filled with ravening beasts.

To go forward was to plunge into the very arms of human brutes, who would shoot them down in cold blood and then gloat over their bodies.

It was a poor choice at best, but the brave fellows did not hesitate.

Another volley of revolver shots showed them that human lives were in danger.

The next moment they had rounded an immense ledge, known as the Rocking Boulder.

A weird scene, lighted mildly by the pale moon, awaited their anxious glances.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOLD-UP.

It was a sight that would have blanched the reddest cheek, yet it fascinated the gaze by its very horror.

The vast mountain ranges formed the background of the picture.

The little party of horsemen riding along the narrow

trail were taken completely by surprise, as a masked highwayman appeared before them.

But they were men of pluck and courage.

Even when the second highwayman's revolver gleamed before their eyes, they were determined not to give up the treasure they were carrying.

The voice of Jesse James smote upon their ears.

It was a cold, heartless order to surrender their treasure.

Then the great outlaw rode forth boldly into the moonlight, with a revolver in both hands.

His brother was close beside him.

And behind him were a number of his men.

The crack of a dozen weapons followed his order.

There was not a coward in the little company that had been chosen to escort the colonel and his daughter upon their lonely journey.

The horses, startled at the suddenness of it all, reared and plunged, and their snorts of fear mingled with the sharp cries and curses.

A woman shrieked faintly as men began falling from their horses, and the terrified beasts dashed into the thicket which bordered the trail.

Jesse James looked like a demon as he sat erect upon the back of his horse.

The horse jumped here and there at each command of his master, but, though the bridle hung loosely upon its neck, it showed no signs of terror.

Master and horse were alike in this, for, with the bullets singing about his ears, the notorious outlaw remained as calm as ever.

His weapon cracked merrily as he directed the onslaught.

When one was empty he drew another from his belt and emptied it.

The little band fought bravely, and they were aided by the detectives. But, in spite of their valor, steed after steed went down, often on top of its wounded rider.

It was all over in a few minutes, and the highwayman had conquered.

"Throw up your hands!" he roared, in a voice of thunder, while Frank James bawled at the terrified horses.

Of the eleven horsemen only six were left.

The seventh rider was a beautiful girl of eighteen.

Her eyes were distended and her cheeks were white with terror.

"Throw up your hands!" roared the outlaw again.

Then a curse fell from his lips. Every man but one had obeyed him.

He leveled his revolver at this obstinate man's head.

A calm, manly voice rang out defiantly.

"Shoot me, if you wish, Jesse James! But tell me first what you mean to do with my daughter."

The daring outlaw smiled.

His men had closed in around the cavalcade now, so he lowered his weapon as he answered the question:

"Your daughter will not be harmed, Colonel Hart. We do not war upon women. We merely wish to relieve you of the gold that you carry in your saddle-bags."

"I might have known the folly of attempting to transport it this way," said the officer, calmly; "but I had heard that you robbers were at your nefarious work in another section of the country!"

"Unfortunately for you, we are here," said Jesse, grimly. "So cease your talk and hand over the gold!"

Frank James rode forward as he spoke.

Colonel Hart lost no time in slipping from his saddle. "Father!"

The young girl had found her voice, and the words escaped her lips like the notes of a bugle.

"Father, I beg of you not to give those ruffians our gold! Let them kill us, if they will, but do not yield to them!"

"Nonsense! That is foolish, daughter!"

"It is not foolish! It is brave! Oh, I shall die of shame if you allow them to rob us!"

The girl's voice trembled, but she urged her steed forward as she spoke.

Jesse James noticed that her hands were still upon the bridle. She had not obeyed his order.

"Attend to the colonel and the gold, Frank," he said, sternly.

The next minute Fleetwind was reined close to the young girl's mount.

"I admire your spirit, miss, but your father is right," the outlaw said, politely. "We will shoot him down like a dog if he does not give up the gold willingly, but you shall live! Do you still advise him to defy us?"

"Oh, no! No! If I am not to die also, my father must live! But oh, you brute! You inhuman monster! Is there no power in heaven or earth that can overcome you?"

A figure stole out of the bushes as she spoke.

It was followed by another. Two frightened horses had wandered from the trail.

Their riders were lying face downward upon the ground, each with a bullet in his body.

Jesse James was so much interested in the young girl's bearing that he did not look behind him.

At the last word the crack of a revolver startled him.

Flash!

Crack!

Bing!

A bullet whizzed past his ear and struck a tree ten feet distant.

Crack!

Crack!

Two others followed.

One struck him squarely in the shoulder.

At the same instant the two forms sprang upon the frightened horses.

They were Miller and Jocelyn, the two Pinkerton detectives.

"Now, men! All together!" shouted Miller. "Let the ruffians have it! Down with Jesse James and his band of cutthroats!"

Colonel Hart's revolver cracked in an instant.

The six mounted men dropped their hands like a flash.

At short range they returned the volley that poured from the weapons of the ruffians.

Jesse James reeled in his saddle. He attempted to recover himself. His men, seeing the plight of their captain, lost their heads for a second.

In that second, Miller dashed ahead, passing close to the young lady.

"Quick! Ride for your life! Follow me!" he cried, sharply.

The young girl needed no urging.

Bending low in her saddle, she was after him like the wind.

A leaden hail whistled over her head.

A sharp corner in the trail saved her.

Five minutes later the detective halted.

He sprang from his horse and rushed to the side of the fair girl.

"Come! There is a cave near by! I will hide you in it! My partner will be here in a minute!"

"Oh, sir! My father!" moaned the poor young girl.

"Jocelyn will save him, if the thing is possible. We must wait in patience. There is nothing to be gained by returning!"

He lifted her gently from the saddle as he spoke.

The moon, shining upon his face, showed her his handsome, resolute features.

Speaking softly to the horses, he began his way through tangled underbrush.

The two beasts followed him as tamely as kittens.

"I can walk! Pray let me walk!" said the young lady, after a minute.

"But it is not necessary. I can carry you with ease."

"Oh, but I insist! It looks so childish of me!" began the young girl.

The weight of her fair form against his bosom had thrilled him.

They made their way through more scraggly thickets, coming suddenly upon the rocky cave that he had mentioned.

It was a poor place for safety, but the best that he knew.

There was room inside for her to rest in comfort.

Leading the horses behind the ledge of rock he tethered them securely.

Then he patted their sleek sides. He would need them later.

Not a sound of the hold-up came to them where they were, and, leaving the young girl alone, Miller went out to reconnoitre.

The detective crept back on the trail, keeping close to the hedges.

As he neared the spot, he heard the whinnying of the horses.

It was dangerous business.

He cared not for himself, but who would save the poor girl if he should be struck with a bullet.

Still he must know something of what was going on.

He feared Miss Hart would go mad if she did not learn the fate of her father.

He dropped upon his hands and knees and crept into the thicket that bordered the trail.

Moving like a tortoise, he crept nearer and nearer.

At last he came to the turn in the trail.

A moment later the voice of Frank James came to his ears distinctly.

"He isn't much hurt, boys! It's only a flesh wound. A swig of whisky will set him on his feet. Now, who is to take charge of the colonel's nuggets?"

It was the great desperado himself who answered the question.

He was standing by his horse, groaning and cursing.

"Let's see. Dale is dead, and Parker is injured. You look after the stuff, Frank, while I attend to the colonel."

"That suits me," said his brother. "Now, what in thunder will we do with this whelp of a detective?"

"Is he dead?"

"No, he's dyin'. Shall we leave him as he is!"

"No we'll be more merciful! Hit him a crack with your revolver!"

Miller ground his teeth, but he was powerless to save his friend.

It was more than he could do, perhaps, to save himself and the colonel's daughter.

The sharp crack of a revolver butt against a human head made his blood run cold.

He muttered an oath of vengeance from his hiding-place in the thicket.

"Frank James, your doom is sealed if ever I get a bead on you again," he whispered to himself.

The next moment he strained his ears to hear the rest of the conversation.

"Now, Bink, you take charge of the horses—we may need them," went on Jesse. "We'll take the colonel to our den in the Black Pit Ravine and leave some one to

guard him. By that time, I expect Apache Jim will be there with the woman."

Miller's heart almost stopped beating.

He had not thought of that.

He cursed his folly in leaving her a minute.

The party of cutthroats were starting now.

It would not do for him to move, for they were coming in his direction.

He was still thinking of the beautiful girl he had left unprotected.

In the hands of Jesse James himself she was comparatively safe.

The great outlaw was noted for his respect of women.

But in the case of Apache Jim, it was entirely different.

The fellow was a half-breed, and the vilest of his kind.

God pity the innocent girl who fell into his clutches!

Miller held his breath as the little group passed him on the trail.

Jesse James rode ahead.

He was stooping slightly.

Directly behind him rode Colonel Hart, with his arms bound tightly.

Frank James led the horse by a bridle attached to his saddle.

On each horse were saddle-bags containing gold nuggets.

Behind the prisoner was Packer, a noted robber.

He sat his horse limply, for he was badly wounded.

The fellow called Bink, the Terrier, brought up the rear.

He was leading the rest of the treasure-laden horses.

He had his own bridle between his teeth, so that he could lead the horses with one hand and hold his revolver in the other.

They passed the detective without ever guessing his presence.

They were cracking coarse jokes, and heaping curses upon the dead detective, whose badge, carelessly but bravely worn, had told them why he was present upon this occasion.

The colonel held his head erect, but seemed to be paying no attention to the words.

A feeling of joy leaped into the crouching detective's heart as he thought that it might be his good-fortune to restore to this brave man his daughter.

He had heard of the colonel often.

He was an Eastern man, who had sought his fortune in the Rockies. His ranch was located a few miles from Golden City, and a recent discovery of gold upon the premises made it an almost priceless piece of property.

The gold in the saddle-bags was the first that had been mined.

In the wake of the robbers lay a number of dead bodies,

and, when the riders rounded the turn, Miller stole out and looked at them. In his anxiety for Miss Hart he could not forget his companion.

The tears sprang to his eyes as he saw the dead detective.

He was as brave a fellow as ever lived, and Miller knew that he left behind him a wife and little children.

"Monster, Jesse James!" he muttered, between his teeth. "To think that he, too, has a wife, and they say that he loves her, yet his victims are numbered by hundreds, while he goes on his way a death-defying demon!"

He shook his fist after the departing cavalcade in impotent fury, but he was by no means the first who had threatened Jesse James with vengeance.

Would he ever be able to execute it?

The effort seemed useless now, as the odds were against him.

He was armed but unmounted, while the robbers rode magnificent animals.

Bending over his comrade, Miller saw a paper pinned to his friend's shoulder.

On the paper were scrawled in pencil these brutal words:

"So perish the pursuers of Jesse James! Detectives, beware!"

A howl of rage fell from the Pinkerton man's lips.

He turned the paper over, and wrote upon the other side of it:

"I swear to avenge my comrade, murdered by Jesse James and his brother.
TOM MILLER, Pinkerton Detective.

Then he crept back into the thicket and crawled along rapidly.

The cavalcade was some distance ahead.

There was no danger of their hearing him.

As he neared the cave his excitement was intense.

The outlaws had passed the spot without so much as a halt.

Would he find the beautiful young girl safe and unmolested?

CHAPTER III.

TREACHERY.

He pushed the bushes aside with an anxious hand.

As he crept softly between the rocks he was listening intently.

The fate of this young girl had become a part of his life.

There was something in her face and voice that had drawn affection from him.

As he neared the entrance to the cave he called softly to the horses, hoping in this way not to alarm her.

There was no response.

Even the beasts were silent.

Had they been within hearing distance they would certainly have whinnied.

He entered the cave.

It was entirely empty.

The young girl had vanished.

Miller ground his teeth at his own stupidity.

He should not have dreamed of leaving her for a minute.

No doubt they had been followed the moment they dashed away from that fearful scene.

The young girl was now in the clutches of Apache Jim.

She might as well have been in the gentle care of the devil.

The young man's frame trembled with rage as he thought of it.

He called her name gently, but it was only answered by echoes.

He put his ear to the ground.

Even the sound of the riders had passed away. There was nothing to be heard but the howl of some wild beast prowling in the bushes some distance away.

He ran around behind the rocks.

There was not a sign of the horses, but all around the spot where they had been tethered were soft prints made by an Indian moccasin.

The brave detective groaned, for his worst fears were now realized.

The young girl had been carried off by the treacherous half-breed Indian.

For just a moment he hesitated; then the conversation between the outlaws came back to him.

"They have taken her to their den in the Black Pit Ravine," he whispered. "As well have taken her to the infernal regions! An honest man can never find her in the Black Pit Ravine, for the place is infested with bloodthirsty bandits, yet I have half a mind to make the trial."

His blood was up at the thought of the young girl's peril, and he was determined to rescue her if the thing were possible.

How was the thing to be done?

Discretion was ever the better part of valor, and he intended to be discreet and not rush headlong into danger.

After a minute's thinking, he arrived at a conclusion.

"It would be folly for me to go to that place alone," he muttered. "I would not be one, two, three, in a game like that. I must go back to Golden City and get a sheriff's posse to go with me."

He started back down the trail.

It was ten miles to Golden City.

The trail was new, and as dangerous as could be found.

It wound over chasms fully a hundred feet deep, and could easily be lost, especially by a stranger.

Miller had only been on the track of Jesse James about two weeks, consequently he was not as familiar with the Black Hills as he might be.

His chum, Jocelyn, had known the locality better.

In fact, he was born within the shadow of the Rockies.

Miller passed the bodies of the dead men with an agonized groan, but the sight of them refreshed his desire for vengeance.

As he hurried on he kept one hand on his weapon, for already the wild beasts of that region were scenting the dead bodies.

He ground his teeth in impotent rage as he thought of his friend being food for catamounts and panthers.

"It is the fate that should befall that human monster Jesse James!" he said, aloud.

A second later some one behind him seconded his sentiments.

"My opeenyun kerjackly, stranger, but you air fearless ernuff tu say it, an' I ain't!"

Miller turned like lightning, with his revolver aimed at the stranger's heart.

The stranger was standing less than a rod away, apparently unarmed.

He had just crawled from the hedge, and was brushing the dirt from his leather trousers.

"Who are you, and where did you come from?" asked Miller, quickly, with his hand still on the trigger.

"Say, stranger, if yer don't mind, yer mought pint that gun the other way. It might go off."

The detective, reassured by the man's manner, lowered his weapon, but still kept it in his hand, ready for instant use.

The newcomer moved nearer to Miller and drew his slouch hat down a little closer.

"Wall, I reckon now as how yer wouldn't know me if I did tell my name, but as ye've axed me ther question I ain't afeard ter give it ter yer, stranger. I'm Hank Bludsoe, at yer sarvice, 'tho' them as knows me best don't bother erbout ther Hank nor ther Soe. They just call me plain 'Blud.' It's easier ter remember!"

"Gee! I should say so! And it is appropriate to this section, where throat-cutting is so common," said Miller, still wary; "but how comes it that you are so far from home. I thought Hank Bludsoe lived in Nugget City."

Hank Bludsoe peered at the detective from under his hat brim as he answered.

"Now, how'd yer know where I lived, b'gosh? Ain't yer one of them tenderfoot miners from Golden City?"

"Everybody has heard of Hank Bludsoe, I guess," went on Miller, trying to ignore the other question. "You are the biggest man in Nugget City, I've been told! Ain't you the mayor?"

The fellow chuckled again, but he was still peering sharply at Miller.

He could see that his companion was accepting his story.

"I reckon now I am! 'Mayor Blud,' they call me! And I'm on ther war path ter-night, if yer want ter know my bizness! I got wind as how Jesse James was er nego-cheeatin' er hold-up, an' I tho't I mout be on hand ter help perfect the colonel."

"Well, you are too late, mayor! The hold-up has taken place! I am sorry to say that I was a witness to it!"

"Great snakes! You was! Then tell a feller erbout it! Danged if I ain't er bin heerin' erbout this hyar Jesse James an' his gang fer nigh on twenty year, and nary so much as a squint hev I had of their actooal doin's."

"Well, you would not want more than a squint, for a worse lot of cutthroats never existed! Go back the trail a piece if you don't believe it! You will find no less than twelve dead bodies!"

"Great Scott! You don't mean it! Is the colonel among 'em?"

"No; they have taken him prisoner, and Apache Jim has the daughter!"

They were both standing in the middle of the trail.

Miller could see that his companion was anxious to view the bodies.

As for himself, he had seen enough of them.

To go back and, perhaps, see a mountain lion devouring his chum was more than he cared to see.

The cry of a panther at that instant fell upon their ears.

"The beasts are after them! We'd only have a fight if we went back!" he said, quickly.

"Was yer in ther scrimmage?" asked the fellow, quickly.

Miller grated his teeth.

"Yes, I was in it," he said, briefly. "I'm pretty certain that I put a bullet in Jesse's shoulder."

"I hope you did," said the fellow, hoarsely. "It's er tarnal pity thet you warn't able ter kill ther scoundrel out-right."

"I'd do it with good grace if I could," was the answer. "Still, I suppose his head is worth more living than dead. Let's see, there's a standing reward of ten thousand dollars offered for him, isn't there?"

"Yes, an', between you and me, I'd like ter win thet thar fortin, stranger, but I'll be jiggered if I know how to dew it exzackly!"

"He's on his way to his den in the Black Pit Ravine now," said Miller, "and I had just started for Golden City to see if I could not stir up the sheriff a little."

"Yew can't do it! The sheriff of Golden City, is

afear'd of his own shadder. Ther mention of Jesse James' name would send him inter hystrikes! What's the matter with yew an' me lookin' inter thet thar ravine?"

The detective gave him a sharp look and did some rapid thinking.

It was taking a big risk to trust the fellow, but he was a match for him when it came to pulling a trigger.

He could at least locate the den, and then back out if he still felt suspicious of the obliging "mayor."

"Will you do it?" he asked.

"Yew bet! Thar's nothin' I'd like better!"

"But do you know the way?"

"Every cussed inch of it."

"And do you think you and I are a match for that gang?"

"That thar depends on how much grit you've got, stranger! Ef yew air er tenderfoot miner, as I guessed, I reck'n I'm riskin' er good 'eal ter make er side pardner of ye, but——"

"But suppose I'm not a tenderfoot miner!"

"Thet's diff'rent! Now, what ther deuce be yer?"

Miller played a bold game. He unbuttoned his coat and disclosed a small silver badge.

"I'm a Pinkerton detective, an I'm after Jesse James! Now you are not afraid to trust me, are you, mayor?"

A gleam of pleasure shot from the "mayor's" eyes, but his hat brim was so low that the detective could not see it.

"Great snakes! You don't say yer is a Pinkerton man!" he said, huskily.

Miller smiled grimly.

"I don't blame you for being surprised, mayor. There are not many Pinkerton men on the track of Jesse James at present."

"You mean that they air mostly killed off?"

"Yes, and their ghosts alone are on the warpath after the rascal! What a reckoning day he will have when he faces them all, mayor."

"You don't believe in nothin' like thet thar, do you?"

They had been walking slowly back on the trail as they talked, and the pile of corpses in the road had come in view before Miller answered.

"Look!" he said, sharply.

He pointed to a dark mass just ahead.

A huge panther was backing away from the pile, dragging a limp body after it.

The beast was snarling and snapping over its inanimate victim.

"Do you think a man can mow down his fellow-men and leave them to a fate like that without at some time, and in some place, being punished for it?"

"Blast it, no! Thet thar is an awful sight, I swar!" said the man. "But tain't the first heap er dead men Jesse James has piled up as a monyment ter his rascality!"

"I swear it will be the last if I can prevent it," muttered the detective.

Then he dropped upon one knee and took deliberate aim at the panther.

Bang!

The panther rolled over almost without a sound, but a hideous cry from an adjoining tree showed that its mate was waiting.

"Now we're in fer it, all right! Thet thar other critter will folier us till ther kingdom come!" said the mayor, un-easily.

They both quickened their steps and passed the pile of bodies. Miller kept looking behind him, but he saw no more of the panther.

She had evidently changed her mind and decided not to follow them.

"How far is it to the Black Pit Ravine?" asked Miller, after a while.

"A good mile and a half from this Rockin' Boulder thet we jest passed. We'll git thar in time fer ther midnight supper."

"What do you mean by that?"

The detective looked at him sharply. The fellow stumbled and then let out a curse.

When he recovered himself he answered promptly:

"It's ernother thing I've heard about them James boys," he said. "They hev a banquet like after all ther vict'ries, an', of course, ef they corraled ther colonel's dust, it was quite er vict'ry."

"They got it, all right! Now, what do you suppose they will do with the colonel?"

"Keep him till he gives 'em a claim on ther mine on his ranch."

"And then will he be set at liberty?"

The "mayor" roared.

He seemed wonderfully well-posted on the outlaw's methods.

"Naw, not by er jugfull! Ther colonel will git it in ther neck when he's done all he kin fer ther boys. They'll bleed him ter the last drop, an' then, ten ter one, they'll keep his darter er prisoner."

"What for?"

"So ther county will offer er ransom, of course! You'd orter know thet thar if yew're a genooine detective."

Once more he glanced sharply at Miller from under his hat brim.

Suddenly the detective stopped and exclaimed:

"Hold on! Where in thunder are you going?"

The mayor had suddenly moved out of the beaten trail and was scaling a low, flat rock.

When he had reached the top, he turned and answered the question.

"This hyar rock marks ther entrance to ther ravine."

Ther black pit is over on ther 'tother side. Yer got ter come up afore yer kin go any further!"

Miller crawled up on the rock. He had an uneasy feeling.

Some way, in the last minute, he had become suspicious of the fellow.

However, it was no time to hesitate, so he followed his leader across the enormous surface of the rock.

As they reached the opposite side, Miller went as near the brink as possible.

The next second his companion laid a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Be keerful thar, stranger; it's er long ways ter ther bottom. Thar's er flight of nat'ral steps on ther other end. I reckon now I'm ther only man outside iv ther James gang thet knows on 'em!"

"You certainly have a wonderful knowledge of the country," said Miller.

A low chuckle answered him.

"I ain't never done much but tramp these hyar hills fer forty year till ther folks at Nugget City put me in mayor."

He began to descend as he spoke, and, just at this point of the journey, the detective was forced to do some rapid thinking.

Should he follow or not?

It seemed like a foolhardy venture, but a reckless spirit had taken possession of him; besides, he was eager for a glimpse of the outlaws' retreat.

The "mayor" looked over his shoulder while he was hesitating.

"You ain't goin' ter back out, be yer, young feller? Durned ef I ain't curus ter see ther hole, ennyhow; besides, I ain't objectin' ter 'arnin' thet thar ten thousand dollars."

Miller decided instantly to go on, at all hazards.

He could pump the fellow full of lead and bolt at the first sign of treachery.

"I'm coming, mayor! Lead on!" he said, promptly; then, as the fellow's head disappeared, the detective made ready to follow him.

The ravine was fully fifty feet below the lowest ridge of hills, and nearly a hundred feet below the surface of the rock upon which he was seated.

The only way down that he could see was by the flight of natural steps in the rock, which were very narrow and almost perpendicular.

The rugged banks of the ravine formed a sort of terrace, rising three tiers deep, and fringed with stunted cedars.

At one end of the ravine the mouth of the black pit opened.

It was a tremendous chasm, made by an earthquake.

At the other end of the ravine he could detect the glim-

mer of light. It was probably the entrance to the den where the outlaws were in hiding.

He slid down the rock as swiftly as he could, landing nearly on top of the athletic mayor.

"Now, then, step easy! Ther's bloodhounds somers erbout," he was warned.

They crept carefully down the ravine toward the light. As they neared it, Miller saw that it was a lantern set on a slab of rock.

The ravine beyond it was in perfect darkness except where, in spots, the moonlight descended to it.

Twenty feet beyond the light they came suddenly to what appeared like a solid wall.

Then, to Miller's utter surprise, the man whom he supposed to be an enemy to Jesse James let out three shrill whistles, which were evidently a signal.

Miller clapped his hand on his revolver and wheeled upon the fellow.

"Curse you! I believe you are a traitor, after all!"

He raised his revolver and was about to shoot, when a hoarse laugh greeted him from behind.

Then a footstep sounded just behind him.

He turned and confronted Jesse James and his brother.

At the same time the mayor of Nugget City stepped up and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Here, Jesse! I have brought yew a prize! He's straight from Pinkerton's! Now, what do I get for him?"

Jesse James burst into a jovial laugh.

"Well done, Bill Nixon! You are as shrewd as ever! Come into the den and tell me where you found him."

He grabbed Miller by the shoulders as he spoke and wheeled him around, while Frank James, at the same time, deftly relieved the detective of his revolver.

Bill Nixon grinned.

He had played his trump card to win his master's favor. It remained to be seen how he would be rewarded.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE DEN.

The detective's first thought was of the colonel and his daughter. At least he was in good company.

He expected no mercy.

Jesse James knew nothing of merciful instincts, for he had never felt them.

As he was leading his captor through a narrow, thread-like path, which wound between the rocks, listening to the story of the detective's capture, he kept bursting forth into laughter.

Frank James and Bill Nixon joined him at intervals.

The latter told how he had met the detective and made him believe that he was the mayor of Nugget City.

"Them Pinkerton men are a pack of fools!" roared Jesse, lustily. "The whole of them together haven't an ounce of brains! The idea of setting such idiots to tracking bandits!"

As he spoke, Miller heard a fearful sound.

It was the hoarse snarl of a bloodhound somewhere ahead of him.

Jesse continued his tirade against the detectives:

"The whole lot of them are not as good at tracking a man as my Terror there! Shut up, Terror! Hold your noise! Don't you know your master?"

The last part of the remark was addressed to the dog, whose savage growls were becoming louder.

"Do you think Terror will let him pass? He smells fresh meat!" laughed Frank James.

Miller held his breath, to hear the answer.

"It doesn't matter much if he don't, I reckon! The beast is hungry, and a detective makes good eating!"

A laugh from all three followed.

The king of desperadoes suddenly stopped pushing the detective.

Whirling him around, so that he was between him and his brother, he took a step forward into what looked like a narrow arch between two immense boulders.

Miller was just in time to see a pair of gleaming eyeballs guarding the arch, when once more the lusty voice of the outlaw echoed through the ravine.

"Down, Terror! Down, you fiend! Do you want to eat me up? Just hold on a bit and you shall dine off of a choice morsel! Ha! ha! I hope you will relish a live Pinkerton detective!"

The dog relapsed into silence and slunk back as he spoke.

As hungry and vicious as he was, he recognized and obeyed the voice of his master.

Even the bloodhounds and wolfdogs stood in fear of this man.

It meant torture in every shape if one of them dared to snarl at him.

"Come on, you sneak! You spy! Come and have a look at your grave!" laughed Jesse, as he stood in the stone arch and reached back for Miller.

Frank pushed the detective forward.

"Now, Terror, guard the path!" cried Jesse, as they all passed in.

"The next wretch who comes this way, tear him from limb to limb, unless he gives us the signal."

With a yelp, the dog sprang to his post.

"Woe be unto any one who attempts to pass him now!" laughed Frank, as he looked back over his shoulder.

Inside of the arch it was a little lighter, but, as Miller raised his eyes, he marveled at it.

They were in a room which seemed cut out of solid stone.

The impenetrable walls rose a foot higher than their heads, and above them was a roof of rough-hewn bowlders.

Some one had tunneled the rocks which filled one end of the ravine.

It might have been Jesse James himself, or it might have been the bandits and brigands who preceded him in the Rockies.

However, this place was perfectly suited to their needs. Another arch was reached after a minute.

As was the case of the other, an enormous animal guarded it.

This animal was a wolf, which Jesse had trained himself.

It was a gaunt, hungry-looking creature, whose eyeballs shot forth flames of fire as it scented a stranger.

"Get back, Torment!" roared Jesse, striding up to the beast. "Don't be in such a hurry, my pretty pet! You and Terror shall squabble over the tidbit later!"

The detective's blood was on fire.

Was it possible that the outlaw was in earnest?

Such horrible words were not meant as jests.

The wolf growled ominously as the trio passed.

Then she, too, slunk back into her place as guardian of the portal.

A moment later there was a blaze of light.

They had emerged into a room which was lighted by two lanterns hanging from the ceiling.

In the center of the floor a fire was burning, the smoke from which ascended in spiral wreaths to a jagged hole just above it, which seemed to be on a level with the bank of the ravine.

Around this fire, which was of small twigs, and which crackled merrily, were thrown bear and lion skins.

At one end of the place were stacked a number of fire-arms.

But Miller hardly glanced about as he entered.

His gaze rested upon two people who were seated upon the rugs, and, just for a moment, he almost blessed the fate that had brought him to share their misery.

These two people were Colonel Hart and his beautiful daughter.

Near them were the saddle-bags of golden nuggets.

The colonel's arms were still bound at his side, and one ankle was fastened firmly to a stake driven into the floor of the cave.

His daughter knelt on a rug at a little distance.

Her arms were stretched out lovingly toward him.

Apache Jim was lying flat upon the stone floor, with his pistol at his side.

The slightest attempt upon the young girl's part to

creep nearer to her father would meet with the disapproval of the half-breed.

Packer, the injured robber, lay upon another rug of fur.

One glance into his white face showed that he was dying.

Bink, the Terrier, sat at his side.

He had a rifle across his knees, and was also watching the prisoners.

The light cast a weird glow over the uncanny scene.

As the group entered Miss Hart turned her gaze anxiously upon them.

As her glance fell upon Miller, she gave a cry of horror.

She had recognized him instantly as the brave fellow who had tried to save her.

"Oh, father! father! They have captured him!" she cried. "They are bringing that noble fellow to this awful place! Oh, it is infamous! Can we do nothing, father!"

The colonel shook his head as he glanced at Miller, sadly.

"Hush, Dora," he said, sternly. "Calm yourself, my child. You will only make a bad matter worse by giving vent to your emotions."

The young girl covered her face with her hands.

She was brave at heart, but this new proof of her captors' villainy had completely unnerved her.

The tears trickled down her cheeks.

Jesse James paid no attention to her.

He motioned the detective to a rug with a show of hospitality.

Then he dropped upon a bearskin by his side and began cursing at the pain which was gripping his shoulder.

In spite of his bravery and cruelty, he was not able to bear suffering.

Bink rose to his feet, and muttered a word to his master.

Then he strode out of the place.

Packer had breathed his last while his master was lying there.

Frank James threw a rug over the dead man's face, after first ridding him of his belt and a brace of fine revolvers.

"A good man gone. We must find some one to take his place, Jess," he said, coldly.

"There'll be nothing for any one to do until my shoulder is well," growled Jesse.

"How about the stagecoach from Cheyenne to-morrow night? Do you mean that we are to overlook that job? It means a cool ten thousand."

"You and Bink can do it! I'm out of it," snarled the outlaw. "I'll rest on my oars, and let you fellows work a little."

"There will be nine men on that coach, not counting the driver."

"Well, suppose there are!"

"Bink is very uncertain."

"Give him a little discipline before he starts; that will fix him, Frank!"

As he spoke he broke out again into curses.

He had felt another twinge in the injured shoulder.

"I wish I had that man! I am sorry you killed him, Frank! I mean the one that put that bullet in my shoulder!"

"Yes, he got off too lucky," growled Frank, "but the doctor will be here soon, and then your shoulder will feel better."

Colonel Hart lifted his head and looked squarely at the outlaw.

"If your shoulder is wounded, my daughter will bandage it," he said, quietly.

"Oh, no! I couldn't do it, father! I wouldn't touch him for the world!" cried the agonized girl.

Jesse James smiled grimly.

Miller's position was such that he could glance behind Jesse's back.

He did so and gave the young lady a quick glance that was seen by no one but himself.

In an instant she made a motion to rise to her feet.

"No, no! I did not mean that! If you are suffering, I will do what I can, Jesse James! I would not be a true woman if I would not be merciful to my enemies."

"Nor a true child of your father," said the colonel, proudly. "You see, I bear you no ill will, in spite of your conduct, Jesse James."

"But you refuse to give me what I ask, just the same," said the bandit king, grimly. "When I ask for a deed to the claim you decline to give it."

"Simply because by doing so I make beggars of my children," said the colonel, quickly. "You are welcome to the twenty thousand in gold that you have captured. That should be enough to satisfy even your greed of plunder."

Miss Hart had risen as her father spoke.

Now she stood awaiting the outlaw's answer.

"Do I look like a man who would accept a paltry twenty thousand when a million or more is within my grasp?" asked Jesse, scornfully.

"No, Colonel Hart! It is a deed or nothing! Give me that claim, and I will set you free! That is my ultimatum. You can take it or leave it."

Colonel Hart leaned back against the stake to which he was bound, and, flashing a glance of hatred on the outlaw, the young girl again knelt beside him.

Miller moved upon his rug.

Rising quickly to his feet he confronted the desperado. In a flash the left hand of the outlaw fell upon his

Miller gave a scornful laugh, but did not move a muscle.

"Well, what have you got to say?" asked Jesse, fingering his weapon.

"I merely wish to ask a question."

"Fire away!"

"How can Colonel Hart make over a claim to you? Do you imagine the Governors of Missouri, Kentucky, or any of the Southern and Western States would let you work it? Would you not be putting your head into a noose the minute you attempted it?"

"I'd take chances on that! What business is it of yours, any way?"

"It is not my business. I asked it out of curiosity."

"Well, 'curiosity' don't go here! Sit down!" commanded the outlaw.

The detective fell back upon his bearskin.

There was a slight smile upon his lips.

As the bandit king had been speaking he had discovered something.

Colonel Hart had succeeded in loosening the bands about his arms.

The cords still remained, but he could rid himself of them at any minute.

Moreover, Apache Jim had fallen asleep.

After hours of tramping over the mountains, the fire had proved too much for him.

Jesse James had not discovered this. He trusted the half-breed implicitly.

He could have sworn that the least movement on the part of his rich prisoner would have been greeted with the click of the half-breed's weapon.

Miller glanced around the place, and tried to measure the chances of escape.

Jesse James could shoot with one hand as well as the other, and Frank and Bill Nixon were both able-bodied murderers.

He looked around for Nixon.

The fellow was right behind him.

He gave vent to a loud laugh of derision as he saw the detective's action.

"Ha! ha! Lookin' for ther mayor, be you?" he roared. "Well, he's right here, you sleuth-hound, an' he's got his two eyes on yer!"

Miller did not reply.

He felt murderous toward the wretch.

If he lived to get out of the place he meant to have a shot at that fellow.

Once more his glance wandered around the place.

The stack of firearms in the corner would arm them sufficiently, if they could only reach them. Still, even then it would be two against four, and no knowing how many more outlaws might appear at a signal.

His thoughts were distracted by the entrance of two men.

They were Buck, the Terrier, and a man he called the doctor.

Miller gave a sharp glance at the newcomer's face, then he caught his breath with a gasp of astonishment.

The fellow was dressed like a cowboy, in leather breeches and leggings and a broad-brimmed hat.

But, in spite of these clothes and a full braid of bristling, reddish hair, he was able to recognize him at once.

He was another detective from the Pinkerton agency.

CHAPTER V.

A FRIGHTFUL SCENE.

"Ther pill slinger is hyar, Jess," said Bink, as they entered. "Lightnin' Foot Tobe went arter him on ther fastest critter in ther stable."

Jesse James gave the fellow a sharp look.

At just that second he had a terrible pain in his shoulder.

"Git down the lanterns, then, Bink, so's he can see what he's about, and get a move on you, Sawbones, and get that cursed lump of lead out of my shoulder! I believe it will gnaw through the bone in another minute."

Bink took down the lanterns and brought them close to the injured man.

This left the corners of the room only lighted by the fitful firelight.

Jesse jerked off his coat as he spoke, and bared his shoulder.

Miss Hart closed her eyes.

The bandage that Frank James had put on when he examined his brother's wound was already crimson with the blood of the outlaw.

Bill Nixon moved nearer to the wounded man to watch the operation.

The place was too safe for them to bother much about their prisoners. It would be death for them to attempt to pass the two four-legged guardians.

Miller gazed as he saw his friend open a battered case of surgical instruments.

The detective had evidently helped himself to some physician's outfit.

Further, he seemed perfectly at home as he examined the injury.

Miller had never known before that he was such a good actor.

As he selected his probes he closed the case and gave it a push with his foot, as if to make room for the lanterns.

It landed within a foot of the skin upon which Miller was lying.

At the same time he gave the detective a cautious glance.

The fire was dying out, but no one thought to replenish it.

The outlaws were all too occupied watching the probing for the bullet.

The detective who was acting in the capacity of a physician kept up a steady flow of talk.

He used the typical vernacular of the Rocky Mountains.

Frank James joined in the talk, but Jesse said nothing.

He was gritting his teeth hard to endure the suffering. "Now, then, somethin' in the shape of a bandage, men!"

said the doctor.

Frank James glanced around.

There was nothing handy.

He strode out of the den.

Bill Nixon pulled a bandana from his pocket and handed it to the doctor.

As he did so, he purposely stepped on Miller's ankle.

It was the detective's opportunity.

He opened the surgical case in a second.

In the cover of the case he found a loaded revolver.

Both Colonel Hart and his daughter saw him secure the weapon.

The next second a signal was exchanged between them.

The last smoldering flame from the fire vanished at that minute.

If the doctor had been waiting for this to happen it could not have given him more pleasure.

Jesse James noticed it, and roared out one of his profanest orders.

It was for Bink to immediately replenish the fuel.

"The Terrier" stole out.

This left only Bill Nixon and the Indian.

The physician glanced back over his shoulder, as if impatient for more bandages.

As he did so he saw that without rising Miller was covering Bill Nixon with the pistol.

A second later the desperado himself noticed it.

Like a flash of lightning he drew his own weapon, and at the same instant he gave vent to a long, shrill whistle.

Miller's revolver cracked at long range.

The pistol in Bill Nixon's hand fell with a thud to the floor, and, giving a yell of rage, the outlaw made a leap forward and then sank down in a heap beside his weapon.

At that instant Miss Hart sprang like a deer toward the stack of firearms.

Grasping the loaded rifles in her arms she hurried back to her father.

Jesse James attempted to rise.

He was held down by a grip of iron.

His physician's hands were around his throat.

The half-breed awoke at the very first shot, but a bullet from Miller's revolver passed through both of the fellow's hands, leaving him practically helpless.

Just as Frank James and Bink appeared in the doorway Miller smashed the two lanterns with one stamp of his foot.

The place was in darkness.

Colonel Hart and his daughter had their weapons aimed straight at the doorway.

Crack! Crack! Crack! went their rifles.

A perfect volley from the outlaws answered them.

The "doctor" found it too warm for him at the side of Jesse James, so he sprang to where his comrades were standing.

The outlaws yelled at each other, and then darted hither and thither.

Miller and the detective shouted to Miss Hart, changing their own locations in the darkness as they did so.

A moment later Miller caught Miss Hart around the waist and raised her high in the air.

The bogus doctor sprang on to his shoulders like a cub, and passed her up through the hole that served as a chimney.

A pair of strong arms were there to receive her.

Whose they were was a mystery to the girl at that moment.

It was hot work for the detectives, but it was done in a second.

Then both stood ready to join in the fray about them.

Shots were being fired more closely now.

It looked as though one outlaw only was left.

Colonel Hart's rifle awoke the echoes, so it was not difficult to mistake it.

The bogus physician moved softly towards the brave man who was still chained to the stake.

The next second he fell to the ground with a bullet in his heart.

It had come from a chamber of Frank James' revolver.

Miller called to Colonel Hart.

He was answered promptly.

The gentleman had been firing as rapidly as possible.

As soon as one rifle was empty he had picked up another.

Miller blazed away and emptied his revolver.

Then a stinging pain in his forearm made him drop the weapon.

It was the last shot fired in the terrible encounter.

Some one had entered the place, carrying three lanterns in one hand.

The other hand clutched a Colt's revolver.

By the feeble light the colonel and Miller viewed the scene.

They were all lying almost side by side.

The man with the lanterns was the only man standing.

Frank James found his voice.

He had been shot through the leg.

"Disarm those devils and then do something for Jess!" he roared. "Throw some water in his face and give him some whisky!"

The fellow cast down the lanterns and then strode across the room.

The weapons were all useless.

Every chamber was empty.

Then he devoted himself to restoring his master to consciousness.

Miller forgot his own wounds as he watched his efforts.

"Curse him! He still lives!" he muttered, under his breath, as Jesse gave vent to a groan, and then began to gasp and snort like a steam engine.

"Who was he—the doctor?" whispered the colonel, as he attempted to stanch the blood that was flowing from a bullet hole in his hand.

Miller bent nearer.

"His name is Lee. He is one of Pinkerton's best men. I expected him to meet me to-morrow in Golden City."

"So my daughter is safe?"

"I think so, sir."

"Thank God!"

Frank James had staggered to his feet and was limping toward them.

"Curse you! Break away, there!" he roared. "You'll live to regret this night's work! You'll suffer the agonies of the damned for your impudence!"

"Is it impudence for a man to try to protect himself against cutthroats?" asked the colonel, coolly.

He had stanchd the flow of blood from his wound by bandaging it tightly.

Miller had a handkerchief bound tightly over his wound.

He felt a little faint, but he was as fearless as ever.

"Little do we care what you do to us, so long as the young lady is safe," he said, scornfully.

"The girl would not have been harmed. You knew that," roared the outlaw.

"But now, by the devil's powers, you two shall have no mercy!"

"We have not expected any from the first," retorted Miller. "We know the James boys too well to expect any mercy."

Jesse James was breathing regularly now, but Bink the Terrier was crying like a baby and Nixon was groaning. The half-breed had not moved after his first wild grab for his weapon. A bullet from some direction had stopped his heart forever.

Frank James seemed beside himself while his brother's fate hung in the balance.

He limped about and shouted orders to every one, even the dead men, whom he could not seem to understand could not obey him.

The man with the enormous Colt's revolver kept looking at Miller. The detective could not move without finding his eye upon him. There was no hope of escape. Their opportunity had vanished. As soon as Jesse revived, they would no doubt be tortured, and their miseries would be prolonged until death should end them.

It was a horrible outlook, but neither the colonel nor the detective flinched from their fate.

It was a comfort to them both to know that Dora would not be obliged to witness it.

At last Jesse James spoke.

His first words were a curse, as usual.

"What has happened, Frank?"

"The doctor was a Pinkerton detective. He fooled us all, but it seems his friend here knew him."

"Did you do him?"

"Yes! He lies yonder! I put a bullet an inch below the spot that his detective's badge covers!"

"Good! And where are our prisoners?"

"The men are here. The girl has escaped us."

"How could she escape from you and Nixon and the Indian! My curses upon you for a pack of traitors!"

"Not so fast, Jess! I got a bullet in my leg just as they passed her up through the chimney. Another struck my weapon! For a minute I was helpless."

"And the girl has gone!"

"Yes. They lifted her to the roof. No doubt this rascally doctor had a confederate up there."

"And is no one on their track?"

"There is no one to go. Not one of our number but what is dead or injured, excepting Lightning Foot. He is at present guarding our two prisoners."

"Then loose the bloodhound! Let him after them at once! For the first time in his career Jesse James will make war on a woman! Curse the girl, I say! She is in league with our enemies!"

"You talk like a madman, Jess! The girl was helpless! If I had something that belonged to that fellow who pulled her up, I could gamble that the beast would not lay a claw on her!"

Jesse James staggered to his feet. He was furious with passion.

"Then bring the beasts in here and let them guard the prisoners while you and Lightning Foot get after the runaways!"

As the outlaw's purpose dawned on the prisoners, Miller gasped with horror, but the colonel was calm.

He could bear anything now that he knew the dog was not to be turned on his daughter.

Jesse James did not intend to let the bloodhounds kill the prisoners, but all the evil in his nature had been aroused and he had determined to put his prisoners through a terrible ordeal before finally making way with them.

Frank James started for the door.

"Ha! ha! A good idea, Jess! But I hate to lose the circus!"

"Oh, I'll tell you the details when you come back," answered Jesse, grimly, "but see to it before you go that every weapon is empty. Here, Lightning Foot, let me have that plaything of yours for a companion! It may be that the brutes will decide to turn upon their master."

Frank left the room and Lightning Foot did as he was ordered. After scowling at Miller again, he handed his weapon to his master. Jesse James put his back against the wall in the farthest corner.

The three lanterns were placed so that he could see his prisoners clearly.

When the two brutes came in, he did not miss a detail of the scene.

The two brave men looked at each other.

Each tried to read the other's thoughts, but, in the confusion of their own, the thing was impossible.

A moment later Buck, the Terrier, raised his head.

"Get us out afore the beasts come in, Jess," he begged.

The outlaw laughed at him.

"Shut up, you idiot!" he roared. "Do you suppose I can't manage 'em? You and Nixon must make your chances for not guarding me better."

"The Terrier" began to whimper again. Crawling on his hands and knees, he managed to get out of the den and hide himself somewhere.

Nixon still lay where he had fallen. He was badly injured.

Lightning Foot strode across the room and examined every weapon. Then he removed them to one corner, as far from the prisoners as possible.

As he was leaving the den the great outlaw called to him:

"Hold! The light is dim! The lanterns are flicker-

ing! Replenish the fire! There are tongs outside! Harry, you whelp, or I'll brain you!"

The fellow sprang to obey his orders.

Jesse James was in a bad mood. It would not do to trifle with him.

Lightning Foot came back in a minute with a bundle of fagots.

They were light and dry. They would blaze with great brightness.

"Ah! That is better! Now the theatre will be well lighted!" roared the outlaw, "and I shall be able to see every feature of my clever actors!"

Once more the two doomed men stared at each other.

All of the horrible tales which they had heard of Jesse James seemed to pale into insignificance before this actual experience.

They knew he was a bold robber and a merciless man, but that he would go to the extremes they feared, had hardly occurred to them.

Just once it flashed into the detective's mind that the outlaw was only scaring them.

That this hideous joke was intended merely as a warning.

This idea was dispelled instantly by a vicious growl.

The bloodhound had been loosed. It was approaching swiftly.

A series of short yelps and barks showed that the wolf, too, had been turned loose upon them.

It was an awful moment.

As the shadow of the huge bloodhound fell upon the threshold, both men turned involuntarily and looked at their captor.

The great outlaw's hand was upon his revolver, but there was a smile of exultation upon his face.

Miller saw the look and it inspired him with courage.

The ravenous beasts might tear him to pieces, but he would not make so much as a moan to please his tormentor.

He glanced at the colonel.

The brave man's arms were folded. His eyes were fixed calmly upon the frightful beast, whose blood-shot eyeballs were now glaring at him.

CHAPTER VI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

The gaunt-limbed animal had paused, and was viewing the scene.

Coming from the darkness outside, the firelight bothered his vision.

Jesse James lifted his voice in a final order:

"Now get up after the girl, Frank! I will attend to this matter. Bring her back in an hour, and the cursed detective with her!"

His brother's voice answered him, but his words were drowned in the yelping of the wolf.

He was holding the fierce brute back for the bloodhound to advance, in order that the two should not fall upon each other and so prolong the period of safety for the prisoners. At his brother's words, Frank James let go of the creature.

Miller could hear the tramp of his footsteps dying out as the yelps stopped for a minute.

The bloodhound sniffed the air.

It smelled both blood and powder.

As it advanced into the room, it made straight for Bill Nixon.

A cry of terror from the wounded outlaw rent the smoke in the cavern.

"For God's sake, Jess, turn the brute!" he bawled. "Open your mouth, man. Do you want him ter tear your friends ter pieces?"

"Friends! Bah!" exclaimed the outlaw. "You are a treacherous friend, Bill! I've been suspicious of you for some time. You must save yourself from Terror!"

Nixon gnashed his teeth.

"But I fetched the whelp of er detective hyar! Hev ye forgotten thet thar, Jess?"

"And how did you protect me from the rascals, I'd like to know? Let them strangle me nigh to death when I was unarmed, you traitor!"

"I didn't mean ter," chattered Nixon.

The brute was almost upon him.

He was too weak to stand and his clothing was saturated with blood.

It was this that had brought the bloodhound toward him.

Miller's eyes were riveted upon the brute.

As he saw the hideous fangs and listened to the vicious growls, he instinctively raised his eyes.

As that second the gleam of a rifle barrel caught his gaze.

It was being aimed slantingly through the jagged hole in the ceiling.

Fortunately for Jesse James, he was out of range of the weapon, a bowlder intervening between him and the hole in the ceiling.

The next second a report shook the very foundations of the cave.

With a fiendish howl, the bloodhound leaped high in the air, then dropped to the stone floor and rolled over and over.

Miller sprang to his feet.

It was time to act.

As the wolf leaped into the den he sprang hastily toward the fireplace.

A bullet from Jesse James' revolver whistled past his ear.

It did not deter him for a single instant.

Seizing a burning brand from the fire, he made a rush for the wolf. He waved the brand as he ran forward, yelling like a demon.

The creature snarled and retreated.

Crack! crack! went Jesse's revolver, but his aim was poor.

His left hand and the flickering lights were baffling his purpose.

Miller drove the wolf before him out into the first rude cavern.

As he hurled the blazing fagot after the creature he stumbled over something.

As they both dashed out into the ravine, he heard the hoofbeats of horses in the distance.

He stopped and looked around.

He was in a curious inclosure.

It was not the way he had come in, for there were no archways and no lanterns.

"It seems cowardly to leave the colonel to his fate," he muttered to himself, "but I cannot save him by staying unless I kill that man."

He moved about the inclosure.

There was not a sound from the wolf, but he could tell there were horses near him.

The air had the unmistakeable odor of a stable.

It was all as dark as ink, and the wolf might spring upon him from any corner; still, there was nothing else to do—he must mount one of the horses.

When he was on the animal's back he would trust all to the creature's instinct.

If there was a way out of the cavern the horse would know it.

Guided by the stamping of the animals, he reached their sides.

There was no time for choosing.

He untied the first one, and was mounted in a jiffy.

The animal was already bridled, and, as he felt the man upon his back, he turned like lightning and fairly bounded from the stable.

In less than a minute Miller could see the sky.

The horse had darted through a narrow opening in the rocks and left the outlaws' den behind him.

That they were still in the ravine was very evident, for the road seemed little more than the dry bed of a stream, and upon either side rose walls of massive boulders.

Which way he was headed the detective did not know.

He left all to the horse, which seemed to know its way perfectly.

After five minutes of desperate riding, the beast suddenly halted.

Then, with a snort, it plunged forward up the very bank of the ravine.

Miller held on for his life. It was a reckless bit of climbing.

The horse had chosen the only spot in the ravine where there was anything like a trail or where the foundations were soft enough for him to get a foothold.

A minute later he had reached a moderately smooth path which followed the ravine back in the direction of the outlaws' den, but which would allow him to look down upon the very roofs of the enormous cavern.

Miller patted the brave animal's neck.

It was a magnificent creature.

In a second it occurred to him that this was the bandit king's own horse, known all over the country as the invincible Fleetwind.

"Furies! How he will rave when he misses it," he muttered, "but how lucky I was to stumble upon the creature!"

He was nearing the cavern roof now, and his fingers closed tightly over a weapon that he had found in the saddle-bags.

No doubt Frank James and Lightning Foot were but a short distance ahead of him.

As he peered about him he tried to locate the chimney in the cavern.

There was no smoke to be seen.

No one would have dreamed that the rocks below were other than solid boulders.

He rode on cautiously, expecting to be shot at any minute.

As he advanced, the country grew wilder and wilder. At a turn in the narrow trail the horse seemed to falter.

It looked back knowingly at its rider, then snorted and trembled.

"There's danger ahead," thought Miller.

Just then a low whistle from the bushes seemed to answer his questions.

It was a signal of some sort, but he could not understand it.

The horse had pricked up his ears at the sound.

Then it began to rear and pull violently at its bridle.

"It is not a friend of the outlaws, evidently," thought Miller.

Then he took chances once more by answering the whistle.

In an instant two forms stole out from among a growth of stunted trees.

Miller was overjoyed.

They were Miss Hart and her strange deliverer.

Fleetwind was snorting viciously now.

"Whoa, you brute! Stand still, can't you?" called Miller, as the two came up to him.

He brought the animal down to his feet with a jerk and then fastened him securely to a tree.

"Hello, Miller, old man! I'm thankful you are safe! Where is my pal, Tom Lee? I hope those ruffians haven't killed him."

"That is exactly what they have done, Higgins."

The young man groaned. It was a sad blow to his hopes. He and Lee had laid many plans together to capture Jesse James.

"And my father? Does he live?" whispered Miss Hart, eagerly.

Her face was as pale as death, but her eyes were shining.

Miller bowed his head. He could not bear to look at her.

He was afraid she would see in his face the fate he feared had been her father's.

"I am sure the outlaws will not kill him! His life is too valuable to them," broke in Higgins, quickly.

It was only an attempt to calm the fears of the young girl.

Miller accepted his cue and endeavored to strengthen it.

"There is no one left in the den to harm him now but Jesse James himself, and he is wounded. If we go back at once we may be able to rescue him."

"Then let us return! Do not delay a minute!" cried Miss Hart.

Higgins dropped upon one knee and put his ear to the ground.

"We gave those two ruffians the slip who were after us," he said, chuckling.

"My horse remained quiet in the bushes, but there's no knowing how soon they'll discover that they have lost the trail and come back here, looking for us."

"You mean Frank James and Lightning Foot! They were just ahead of me. If they had not left the den just as they did I would not be here to tell the tale this minute."

"You mean you overpowered Jesse James!"

"No, I bolted! The bad light in the place prevented

his hitting me. He had just had those two brutes brought in to tear me to pieces. Now, who the deuce was it that put that lucky shot down the chimney?"

He stared at Higgins, but the young man only stared back in amazement.

Miller hurriedly explained the occurrence.

Miss Hart gasped for breath, but she bore up bravely.

"It must have been the man we passed on the brink of the ravine," she cried. "The one that terrified me so! The mysterious creature who glided by us so swiftly in the darkness!"

"That was never a man! I'll swear it!" cried the detective, grimly. "You should have seen it, Miller. He flitted by us like a shadow. I tried to stop him, but he went like blazes!"

"Well, whoever he was, I'd like to meet him," said Miller. "He saved my life all right by killing the bloodhound."

"Hark!"

It was Higgins who spoke.

He had dropped to the ground again and was listening intently.

"They are coming back! Quick! This way, Miller! You must leave that horse! He will not obey you!"

They dashed into the bushes, leaving Fleetwind beside the trail. They had attempted to send the animal careering down the trail, but the horse had scented the others, and had bounded off in their direction.

"There's a lot of low brush just a little farther back! We can put up a stiff fight from behind it, if the villains force us!"

They made their way to the spot as swiftly as possible.

Miss Hart had a revolver in her hand, which the detective had given her.

Higgins had another in his grasp.

Miller still held tenaciously to the one he had so fortunately found. As they all crouched behind a thick clump of underbrush they heard plainly the sound of horses' feet coming rapidly toward them.

CHAPTER VII.

A CURIOUS STRANGER.

A surprised shout broke from the lips of Frank James as he suddenly rounded a turn in the trail and caught sight of his brother's horse.

"By thunder, Lightning Foot! Jess has had to run for it. Now, what in all Hades do you suppose has happened?"

"Ther dog must er turned on him."

"Nonsense! He could shoot the dog!"

"Then ther wolf took er notion ter chaw him up!"

"I don't believe a word of it. I'll bet that detective had friends lurking around the den. As like as not, they went in as soon as we rode away. Jess probably had to ride for his life. Now, where the deuce is he?"

Lightning Foot had dismounted while the outlaw was talking, and was closely examining the tracks on the ground.

Further on something in the trail caught his attention.

"Them thar tracks warn't made by Jess," he said, after a minute. "Thar's three on 'em, Frank, an' one is er woman's."

The three people behind the bushes groaned as they heard these words.

They had hoped that their presence in the locality would not be discovered.

Frank James sprang to the ground, and examined the tracks.

The two outlaws were just out of range of the men hiding in the thicket.

"Thet thar is ther oddest thing in all creation," said Lightning Foot again. "I wouldn't er believed the Fleetwind would let any one but Jess drive him out o' ther stable."

"He wouldn't unless the wolf scared him. He's almighty afraid of that beast torment. Well, we've got to investigate and see what's behind these bushes."

"Go easy, Frank! Ef thar's any one thar, they've got er bead on us most likely."

"We've got to chance that. Tie the horses to that sapling yonder, and come on!"

He strode into the bushes as he spoke.

A second later a bullet sped by his head.

He bolted behind a tree and yelled at his comrade.

"There they are, just beyond the clump yonder! Go around that big rock and cover them."

Lightning Foot finished fastening the horses and then did as he was directed.

The brush behind which Miss Hart and the two detectives were hidden was thus well covered.

Miller had his eye upon the tree behind which the outlaw was crouching.

His friend turned instantly so as to face the other direction.

Miss Hart still grasped her weapon, but she was kneeling in a cramped position.

It was doubtful if she would be able to aim with any accuracy.

"Now, then! Give it to them! Pepper the bushes!" shouted Frank James.

Crack!

Crack!

The reports sounded almost together.

The bullets sped over the heads of the trio in the brush.

They had been aimed too high to do any damage.

"Hold your fire! They'll expose themselves if they think they have finished us," whispered Miller.

There was not a sound made in the bushes.

Frank James listened a minute and then shouted another order.

"We've got to flush 'em, Tobel! Move up a little more to the right and aim low next time. Empty your rifle, if it is necessary, to riddle the bushes!"

Miss Hart gasped with horror as she heard the order, but not a sound escaped her lips. She was a true daughter of her father.

"Now! Both together!" yelled Frank again, as his head protruded from the shelter of the tree trunk.

There was a sharp crack of a rifle.

A dozen shots followed.

They seemed to come from all directions.

Then a voice that sounded almost inhuman seemed to echo through the ravine, and a man who had been walking along the trail fired three shots from his rifle in quick succession.

Lightning Foot fell to the ground.

Frank James looked over his shoulder and gave a yell of dismay.

The next second he cut the halter which bound Fleetwind, and, leaping on his back, was off like a shot.

The stranger fired a shot at him as he dashed away.

The outlaw returned the fire by rising in his stirrups and firing over his shoulder.

Miller and his friend sprang from the bushes.

They were confronted calmly by the extraordinary stranger.

"You have saved our lives! How shall we thank you?" began Higgins, quickly.

The man stood still, and gazed at them without speaking.

Miller glanced at Lightning Foot as he passed them.

The fellow was dead.

He strode into the beaten trail and held out his hand to the stranger.

"You are a friend in need, see! Might I ask your name? You came just in time to save this lady."

Miss Hart was creeping from the bushes as he spoke.

As he saw the young girl, a change came over the stranger's features.

"What's them devils up ter now?" he asked, in his powerful voice. "Snakes and furies! It's er pity I didn't kill t'other instid o' this one!"

Miller explained to the man that Miss Hart's father had been taken prisoner by the James boys.

"I reckon I was just in time ter save him, then," said the man, grimly. "I put er shot through the chimney of his den erbout an hour ago on purpose ter scare Jess."

"And you saved my life by doing it," said Miller, quickly. "You killed the bloodhound and gave me my chance to make a break for safety."

The fellow laughed. It was like a clap of thunder. Such an enormous voice never before issued from the throat of any human being.

Then he turned to Miss Hart and touched his broad-brimmed hat politely.

"Ef ye'll accept of the Echor's hospertalerty, yer air welcome ter it, miss! I've got er cabin a mile erway, where ther devil himself can't find it!"

"That's the place we're looking for," said Higgins, quickly. "It is imperative that we find a safe place for this lady. We must rescue her father before we go on to Oreville."

"Yes, indeed! I will not go a step farther without first knowing the fate of my father," cried Dora Hart, tearfully; "but I shall be, oh, so thankful for a place of safety!"

"Then yer kin come with ther 'Echo of ther Ravine! Thet thar is what they call me, miss! 'Tain't much of er name, but it serves my purpose."

He chuckled as he spoke, and the two detectives looked at each other. They were wondering whether it was safe to trust him.

Miss Hart decided the question by putting her hand on the Echo's arm.

"I'll go with him, gentlemen! I feel sure that I can trust him and, oh, I implore you to go back and try to save my father!"

"But when and where will we meet again?" asked Miller, anxiously.

His eyes were bent upon Dora's face with an unmistakable glance of affection.

The Echo answered his question.

"Do yer know ther route of ther stagecoach from Lead City ter Oreville?" he asked.

Higgins nodded his head.

"I can find it. Why do you ask?"

"Cause ther James boys air a-goin' ter hold up thet thar stage at ther Quicksand's ter-morrow night 'twixt ten an' eleven. I'll be thar ter see ther fun an' yer kin report ter me then erbout yer luck with Jesse an' ther gal's father."

The two detectives exchanged glances. They could not understand the fellow.

"Oh, gentlemen! Pray don't mind me! Do please go back and try to save my father!" pleaded Dora, again.

For some reason she seemed to feel implicit confidence in the stranger.

The two horses that Frank James and Lightning Foot had ridden were still standing near by, and at that moment Higgins happened to think of his own faithful animal.

The poor beast was still lying flat in the underbrush. A bullet from some weapon had killed him instantly.

"Now the question is, how shall we divide the beasts," said Higgins, soberly.

Another loud laugh from the stranger followed.

"Tain't ther likes of the Echo what has any use fer them thar beasts," he said, jovially. "Ther ain't no beast thet kin foller to my cabin. Yer kin take ther chitters an' I'll take ther lady."

He picked Miss Hart up as though she was a feather.

The next second she was comfortably seated upon his brawny shoulder.

"Now don't worry about me, please! I am sure this man will protect me!" called out Miss Hart. "And there is no alternative! I must go with him! It is the only way possible for you to save my father."

Miller bowed his head as the Echo strode away, carrying his precious burden.

As they turned the bend in the trail, Higgins began talking to the horses as though he intended to mount one of them.

"Wait a minute, Miller! Keep up the bluff, old man," he whispered, after another yell at the horses, "we'll get after him just as quick as it is safe to do so! Now, where in thunder do you suppose he is going to take her?"

"I'll find out or die," muttered Miller, putting his ear to the ground. He could hear the rustling of the underbrush as the strange man tramped through them.

"If we only knew whether he was a friend or a foe, we would know what to do," went on Higgins. "The girl would be right in our way if we went back after her father, and she would not go on without him."

"No; her devotion is wonderful, but, come!" said Miller, softly, as he sprang from the ground. "Cut the horses loose! That will make him think we have ridden away! It will never do for him to guess that we are following him."

"No. He seemed willing enough to take Miss Hart, but he had no notion of inviting us to inspect his shanty."

"We'll do so without his invitation. But how about Lightning Foot? Shall we let him lie here?"

"Yes, the whelp! I am sorry that he should lie in the same resting-place with your faithful steed, Miller."

"So am I, but it can't be helped! Come on, Higgins! I have almost lost the sound of his steps. It will never do to let him get so far ahead of us!"

The two detectives slunk into the brush as they spoke, and, moving as swiftly as they could, hurried after the strange fellow.

They followed the trail for some minutes, and then Miller paused. He had found where the Echo had left the trail, and made his way into what looked like an impassable forest.

The two detectives consulted a minute, then they struck out boldly in the same direction.

Daylight had dawned, but it was soon left behind them, and they were obliged to stop every little while and seek the trail by means of broken twigs and branches.

Suddenly the sound of a waterfall reached their ears.

They parted the last thick growth of underbrush and found a clear space before them.

To the right was a magnificent stream pouring down the mountain side. To the left wound a gorge that looked like the dried bed of another mountain stream, and which seemed to leap up the side of the dark mountain.

They plunged into this recklessly. Their clothing was torn in shreds. Then came a half hour of fearful and exhausted climbing.

"By Jove! I've found it!" cried Miller, at last.

He had discovered a flicker of light a little distance ahead of him.

"It's a log cabin built in between two bowlders, and with the mountain at its back!"

"Why, the man could defy the world from that place," answered Higgins.

The two stood perfectly still for a moment and gazed around. They were wondering if they had followed the Echo after all, or had stumbled upon some bandits' home in the lonely mountain. Miller felt for his weapon.

It was in his belt, but every chamber was empty.

Higgins was in the same plight. They were as good as helpless.

"Nevertheless, we must see what he has done with Miss Hart," whispered Miller, decidedly. "When I know that she is safe, I shall be willing to try and save her father."

"We must find some way to look in that window. Move softly, Miller!"

"There are nothing but rocks. It will be impossible not to make a noise. I believe they have been put here for that very purpose!"

As Miller spoke his foot came in contact with a large, loose stone.

It starting rolling at once, and dashed down the mountain side, bumping from rock to rock.

"Now you've done it!" whispered Higgins, as he dropped flat upon his face. Miller followed his example. The next second the two detectives thought that the world was almost coming to an end.

Such a din as arose around their ears they had never before heard. A dozen dogs seemed to begin barking at once.

Then there came a sound as if a hundred feet were moving up the mountain.

A pistol shot rang out, and hundreds followed it.

One could have believed that a troop of cavalry was approaching.

The din lasted for several minutes, and the detectives expected momentarily to be surrounded by bandits, or, perhaps, torn to pieces by vicious wolf dogs.

But the various noises subsided without a single creature appearing. Then Miller raised himself upon one shoulder and looked at his companions.

"Now what in thunder is the meaning of all that?" he whispered, cautiously. "Darned if I didn't think the whole population of the Rockies was coming."

"So did I, but I guess we've been taken in, old man," said Higgins, softly. "I'll bet the whole tarnal racket was made by one man, one dog and one shot from a rifle."

Miller scrambled to his feet. He understood at once.

"You mean it's the echo——" he began.

"That's exactly what it is. We've found that fellow's cabin all right. That's exactly why the natives have given him the name of the Echo."

The two detectives stood side by side. Their courage was coming back. The light from the cabin window was about one hundred yards ahead of it.

"Once more, and easier this time," whispered Higgins, softly.

They each took one step forward, and then stood perfectly still.

A hundred voices seemed to call out to them at once.

"Halt! Who comes there! Not another step at your peril!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAVE.

Not a sound escaped the lips of either detective.

They had crouched instantly behind the bowlders that bordered the path to the cabin.

In spite of the echo, they were able to recognize the voice of the man who had spoken.

It was the stranger who had Miss Hart in his charge.

Once more the thunderous voice called upon them to answer, and the rocks and cañons gave back a hundred echoes.

Then the cabin door slammed, and all was still.

Miller moved cautiously to the side of his new friend and listened. After a few moments, he said:

"We must find some way of looking into that cabin window."

"There's a dog there all right."

"Yes. The old fellow is safely guarded. It's no wonder he said the devil couldn't find him."

"Once let me know that Miss Hart is safe, and I will go back to that den and defy the King of Bandits!"

"Yes. The colonel must be saved for his daughter's sake! Jesse James will murder him if he cannot get that deed in any other way."

"Yet how could he work the claim?"

"Easy enough! He could have the papers made out in some other name, assume the name himself, and pose in Golden City as that person."

"A daring thing to do."

"Yet Jesse James has done many things more dar-

g. He can disguise himself so that his own wife will not know him."

"So I have heard. The fellow is a wonder. I should like to be the one to rid the country of him!"

"And get the ten thousand dollars reward!"

"Hush! There's some one coming! Or is it the echo? I'm sure I heard a sound behind us!"

"It is a step! I'm sure of it! We've been followed our turn! Hide yourself, Miller!"

Higgins crouched behind a rock as he spoke.

Miller followed his example.

A moment later they heard a series of suspicious sounds.

The lightest possible footfalls followed each other.

It was not 'the Echo' this time.

The sounds were like the moving of small stones, accompanied with a light grating.

The side of the mountain was gray in the morning light, and soon those who were stealing up the gorge could be seen by those in hiding.

It took but a glance to recognize the form of Frank James.

Jesse James, the king of robbers, was behind his brother.

He had left his prisoner to follow the detective.

Then two more figures crept up the rocky path.

All four had not made as much noise as would have been made by a wildcat.

As their heads first came in view, the detectives could have picked them off easily, but the weapons in their pockets were empty of bullets.

Should the outlaws discover them they could soon make "crow's meat" of them, but both were conscious of the fact that it was they who had shown the rascals the way to the cabin.

If harm came to Miss Hart, they would be responsible.

The four desperadoes stopped directly in front of the rock behind which the detectives were crouching.

They put their heads close together, and held a consultation in whispers. Jesse James cursed as usual.

With an oath, he exclaimed: "It's the fellow they call 'The Echo.' It ain't the first time he's tricked us and now we'll riddle his old shanty!" he said, viciously.

"Who the deuce would ever dreamed of thet thar cabin bein' hyar," was the answer of one of the men. "Thet thar 'Echo' has lived in ther ravine fer nigh on two year, an' thar ain't no one erbout hyar as could locate his quarters kerzackly."

"Well, we've located it, thanks to those whelps, the detectives! They must have chummed in with the fellow to get him to bring them here. Let's see, that makes four altogether inside the cabin."

"Three men an' ther gal an' two wolf dogs," said the other, in the same cautious whisper. "Ther gal don't count, tho'—"

"I ain't so sure!" broke in Jesse James. "If she's like her father, she's grit clear thro'. I left him guardin' a gun-trap, and not lettin' out a whimper."

The two detectives looked at each other as they heard this news.

They knew exactly what a gun-trap was.

Jesse James had fastened a string to the hammer of a loaded gun and then tied it to the colonel.

If he moved so much as an inch he would be his own executioner.

It was a device that was calculated to keep a man where you wanted him, despite his inclinations to go elsewhere.

Further, a man so tied was apt to move through sheer uneasiness.

It would be a nervy man, indeed, who could endure such torture.

It began to look as though they would be too late to save the colonel.

But they were inwardly swearing to protect his daughter.

"Advance on yonder cabin, boys! There's no use waiting if you have got your wind," said Jesse James, softly.

"Sh! Be keerful, Jess. Don't wake the echo! You'll hev ther mount'ins down on us ef yer speak louder than er whisper."

"Let them come! I defy them!" roared Jesse James, aloud.

He was boiling with fury, and could contain himself no longer.

If a thousand tongues had taken up his words, the uproar could not have been greater.

At the same time the four men dashed toward the door.

The echo of their footsteps made the place a bedlam. In a second the rocky mountain side was alive with noises.

There were cries of "halt," seemingly from the depths of the caverns to the lofty summits.

The outlaws pressed on, straight to the cabin door.

The detectives ground their teeth as they fingered their useless weapons.

"Quick, Higgins! Crawl around the bowlder and get as near as you can!" whispered Miller; "but don't venture into the path. It will queer us if they see you!"

The brave fellow swung himself around a bowlder as he spoke.

A chasm yawned below him, but he maintained a sure footing.

Higgins followed carefully, and together they neared the cabin.

Jesse James was already kicking the door, and demanding admittance.

A puff of smoke shot from a hole under the eaves of the cabin.

A report followed.

A bullet from a rifle grazed the cheek of the outlaw.

"Curse him! Break in the door, Jess!" roared Frank James.

Another puff of smoke followed and the speaker's hat was cut by a bullet.

"My shoulder is too sore! Come on, men!" growled Jesse James, who had not even dodged the bullets.

Frank James advanced, with the men crowding close to his heels. As they put their shoulders to the logs the door flew open.

There was a series of yelps and two wolf dogs sprang upon them.

They were monstrous creatures and seemed ravenous for their victims. In an instant one of the brutes set its teeth in the great outlaw's coat.

He seized the creature by the throat and tore it loose. Then with a mighty twist he flung it over the nearest boulder and down into the cavern.

The creature's death-cry came back from a hundred directions.

It sounded as though the corner was full of dying hounds.

The other creature had sprung at the throat of one of his men, but Jesse James passed the two without so much as a look at their struggles.

A second later he and his brother disappeared in the cabin. The third man, who was a dwarflike creature with a hump on one shoulder, paused a moment to see the finish of the unnatural battle.

As his comrade at last put a bullet into the dog's heart, he grinned with satisfaction. Then the two followed their master into the rude log cabin.

They had gone on a search for Dora Hart.

What would be the result when they found her?

Miller's face was as white as death as he thought of it. He could not stay where he was a minute longer.

Miller was doing some rapid thinking.

The echoes had subsided and both were listening intently.

"There has been no struggle inside there yet. What does it mean?" asked Higgins.

"Perhaps the Echo has a secret passage! Thank God if it has. If we only had six shots apiece for our weapons!"

"We could follow them in and take them by surprise. As it is, to go in there would be worse than useless."

The detective ground his teeth.

They were in a desperate position.

They felt that they were utterly helpless when, perhaps, they were most needed.

The moments passed and the suspense became unbearable.

The light still flickered in the window, but there was not a sound in the cabin.

"I can't endure this a minute longer! I must go in!" said Miller, savagely.

"Come on, then!" was his friend's low answer.

They stepped out from behind the rocks.

They were not over forty feet from the door of the shanty.

The wolf dog lay stiff in death across the sill.

Miller stepped over her cautiously and peered into the cabin.

What he saw was a low room with a huge fireplace at one end. The logs were blazing as though they had just been lighted, but there was not a sign of smoke visible above the cabin.

There was no time to look into this matter now.

The detectives scanned the place with anxious faces.

Skins of panthers, leopards, wildcats and bears were spread upon the floor.

This explained at once why all footsteps were deadened.

Miller moved softly ahead. He had discovered another door, and without hesitation he opened it softly.

It led directly to an enormous cave that seemed to extend into the very heart of the mountain.

"This is where they have gone," he muttered, as he peered before him.

Miller glanced around the room as he spoke.

There was a rude bench in one corner, over this being a moose's head, and two muskets were laid across the massive antlers.

In a second he had them down.

They were both loaded.

He glanced about in the hope of finding more ammunition. At that instant a dull roar seemed to come from the very bowels of the mountain. It rumbled like the thunder of distant artillery.

"Quick! They have found him! We will be too late!" cried Higgins.

He grabbed one of the muskets as he spoke.

Then the two dashed forward into the inky darkness.

They were doing a deed which required the bravest and daring.

They were in a cave scarcely higher than their heads and in danger of being shot down at any moment.

Yet they did not flinch.

It was what they were there for.

They hoped to rid the country and the world of the notorious James boys.

Miller hoped also to save the girl, whom he had learned to love.

For her sake he would have braved a thousandfold worse dangers.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MOUNTAIN CAVERN.

They advanced through the dark cave at as rapid a pace as possible. The ground was reasonably hard, but there were deep pools of water at intervals. They were obliged to feel each step of the way to keep from splashing into these dirty puddles, and so betraying their presence to those ahead of them.

It was nothing more or less than an ink-black mountain cavern.

The air grew fouler as they advanced, and the rocks over their heads began to drip with moisture.

Suddenly Miller stopped and waited for his companion.

"We should have overtaken them by this time! How far does this cave go, I would like to know!"

"There seems to be no end to it. Shall we go on, old fellow?"

"Yes. There is no alternative. The Echo must have gone this way, and the ruffians are ahead of us. We must not turn back! I shall go until rocks or water stop me!"

"Forward, then! We are losing time!"

"Hush! Wasn't that a voice?"

Miller whispered the question.

A curious noise could be heard in the cave.

After a minute the strange sounds shaped themselves into words.

They seemed to be shouted across a considerable distance.

"Listen! It is that dwarf! I know his voice," whispered Higgins.

The two detectives bent their heads and listened intently.

A moment later they could hear footsteps distinctly.

two members of the gang of ruffians had decided to back.

They would receive a warm welcome when they had advanced a few yards further.

Just out of range of the detectives' fire they seemed to come to a sudden halt.

A short conversation followed, which was interspersed with curses.

"Jess hez got ther gal! Ther's no use our goin' on! er devil take ther hole ennyway! I'm ez wet ez er wended pick'el!"

"That thar Echo put up er purty stiff fight, didn't lie, eh? But his goose is cooked! Ther won't none on us thar liver skeered outen us with his roarin' down ther ravine in futur'! He's nigh drew me ter plungin' over er ditch a hundred times with his onairthly whoopin'!"

He hed it in fer ther James gang all right, too! in't onct nor twice thet he's skeered Jess outen his ses! Wall, ther cap'n hez squared ther deal! He's t him down on his own diggin's. Ther Ravine iz us ther spirit of its echo."

"Who ther deuce wuz he, ennyway?"

"Ther ain't no one knows kerzackly. Ther's them thet he wuz robbed by ther James boys onct an' ain't er fergot it. They stole er dozen hosses or so, an' ned him out kumpletely."

"I dunno ez I blame him fer hatin' 'em, but 'tain't dun much good! Ther James boys are wonders. Ther Nick himself can't kill 'em."

"Where'd Jess take ther gal?"

"Back to ther den, I s'pose! Thet thar openin' ahead ngs out on ther Red Ash Level. It's er straight trail to ther den, but it's too well traveled ter be kerzackly asant. Ther cap'n kin go thet thar way ef he wants. I prefer the t'other."

There was a splash into a pool and the conversation sed for a minute. The two ruffians employed all their ath in vigorous cursing.

A moment later a great puffing and snorting showed t the two rascals were once more on solid ground.

Then the conversation was resumed.

"Blast ther hides of them detectives! Where'd ye ose they went, ennyhow, Pete?" said one.

"I reckon they bolted thro' ther openin' beyond an' left er gal ter her fate! Ef they'd hev staid by we'd er erd 'em afore this, I reckon."

"Then ther course is clear fer us ter skin out as we me in. We'll take er look over ther fellow's cabin as go! 'Pears ter me I seed er thing er two thet wuz th ther nippin'."

"Where do we go from hyar, pard?"

"To ther Lead City trail. Jess hez er job on fer ter-ght."

"You mean ther stage coach?"

"Yes. Ther's ten thousand in cash in ther deal, he z."

"Thet thar don't mean thet you an' me will git it."

"Thet's so, pard. But we'll git our share. Jess iz are on ther divvy when he's not sore on ther gang!"

"An' when he is!"

"When he's outer sorts ther ain't but one thing ter do, ete. Thet thar is ter pump yurself full o' lead 'fore Jess is ther chance ter do it fur yer!"

"I reck'n yer right!"

Another splash followed.

They were near the detectives now. A bend in the cave permitted them to talk in safety.

Miller's fingers were on the trigger of his musket, and he was gazing ahead into the inky darkness.

He did not mean that either ruffian should escape him.

Suddenly a shrill cry pierced the depths of the cave.

Then came the sound of some huge animal clawing and spitting among the bowlders that formed the side of the cavern. It was between the detectives and the robbers.

There was no mistaking the sound. Even the detectives knew that it was some ferocious creature which had crept from its lair on the hunt for victims.

They had only time to locate the spot, when, with a fearful yell, the creature crouched for springing.

Which way would it turn?

Who would be its victim?

Miller caught the gleam of its fiery eyeballs turned his way for a second; then, with another cry, it leaped toward the turn in the cavern.

The report of two revolvers rang out instantly.

The detectives could hear the bullets flatten against the rocks. They had done no damage.

Then a shriek from two human throats blended with a snarl from the monster.

It was plain now who were to be the victims.

"Come!" cried Higgins. "Let's get out of this, Miller! The beast will pay our debts! They'll never in the world be able to hit it."

A fiendish yell from the dwarf seemed to verify his words. The beast was upon the robbers. It would be a hand-to-hand contest.

The two detectives improved their opportunity to retrace their steps.

Groans, yells and snarls seemed to follow them. When they finally reached the log cabin, they closed the heavy door behind them, then, just for a minute, they stared at each other.

They were begrimed with mud. Miller was the first to think what was next to be done.

He ransacked the cabin and found two pairs of leather breeches, two remnants of shirts and some buckskin leggings.

Then the two hurried down the gorge to the bed of the mountain torrent.

After a bath in its cool waters they donned their stolen garments.

Nothing had been seen of the two wretches in the cavern, so the detectives decided that the awful fight had been fought to a finish.

No doubt beast and men had perished in the encounter.

It was a fitting end for the robbers.

The detectives moved softly, so as not to awaken the echoes. They felt deep regret for the strong man who called himself the Echo, for they knew that he had died fighting bravely.

An hour later they were back at the ravine preparing to try once more to save the colonel and his daughter.

The day was advancing.

As they reached the brink of the ravine they paused for a close inspection of its bowlders.

"Daylight and darkness are alike to Jesse James," said Higgins, "so we have nothing to gain by waiting until evening."

"No. And to-night he has other work cut out. The Lead City coach is to be held up at a place called the Quicksands."

"The worst spot for miles around! I know it well! Jess couldn't have chosen a better place! Why, even the quicksands themselves will help him! A false step of the leader and over they will go! Coach, passengers and all will be buried alive in ten minutes!"

"I've heard of the spot, but I didn't know it was so bad as that! Thank God, Miss Hart is not in that danger! I can think of nothing but her safety, Higgins."

He ground his teeth as he spoke, and then his bronzed face paled a little.

It had occurred to him that, so far, Jesse James had outwitted him at every turn.

Turning to Miller, Higgins said: "There is no one in the den now but Jess and Frank and Bink, the Terrier, and we know he is wounded."

"A dozen recruits may have appeared by this time! For instance, the two we left in the cave. Where did they come from?"

Miller shook his head.

As they talked, the two detectives secreted themselves behind the rocks. They could scan the ravine almost from one end to the other.

They were about half way up the rugged bank.

Above them was the crest of a range of thickly-wooded hills. Below them was the bottom of the gorge, one end of which opened into the black pit. The end that they looked down upon was choked with enormous boulders, which they knew to be hollow in spite of their solid aspect.

Yet not a line of smoke was visible.

The rocks seemed heaped with a careless hand, boulder upon boulder.

Yet Higgins knew this appearance was all a sham.

There was a secret passage under the upper layer of rocks.

It wound, by a circuitous path, through almost shell-like boulders.

He had followed Lee and Lightning Foot through the hidden entrance to this path after his friend had succeeded in impersonating the doctor.

As they stood together now, eagerly scanning the ravine, he told Miller the details of that clever experience.

They had found the so-called doctor in his cabin, and made the deal.

When Lightning Foot came for the "pill slingers' services, it was Lee who answered the summons.

Higgins followed at a distance and learned the passage to the roof.

He had been in time to pull Miss Hart up through the chimney.

The question now was how to find the secret passage.

It was for this that he was scanning every chasm and boulder.

The distant peaks that hemmed them in were glistening in the sunlight, yet the ravine rested, throughout its whole length, in gloomy shadow.

No doubt whoever was in the den would remain there until night.

If this was the case, there was no use in delaying.

Suddenly a thought flashed through Miller's mind,

causing him to turn to his friend with a brighter countenance.

"It is possible they have not returned! You know it is a round-about way across the Red Ash Level!"

"In that case we would be here first. The question is, how, then, would they enter the ravine? Not by the trail, surely."

Miller glanced across the bridge of rocks to the opposite bank.

As he did so, he uttered a warning cry and crouched lower behind a boulder.

His friend followed suit and then waited for explanations.

"There they are! On the opposite bank! There's a path half-way up, the same as there is on this side!"

Higgins peered out cautiously.

He saw the two horsemen indistinctly.

The first was Jesse James.

He had a woman before him on the saddle.

A moment later the riders disappeared.

They seemed to pause behind an immense body of rock.

Miller stared at the spot.

They did not emerge from it.

"Come, Miller!"

Higgins spoke with a ring of exultation in his voice.

Once more he was on the way to the secret passage.

He slid down the bank to the mass of rocks, and, as he crept over them rapidly, his companion followed.

They were traversing the very roof of the outlaw's den, but Higgins hardly took his eyes from the boulder on the opposite bank behind which Jesse James and his brother had vanished.

They scrambled up the bank until they reached the trail.

The hoofprints of the horses were plainly discernible.

As they neared the boulder, Miller gave a low cry.

There were fresh indentations in the ground which puzzled him exceedingly.

Higgins said nothing, but led him around the rock.

A stout hickory log projected from underneath it.

The log acted as a lever.

Throwing their weight against it, the stone moved easily.

It disclosed a jagged hole in the ground, leading down at a sharp incline.

When the stone was in position, it covered the hole completely.

As it stood now, a horse might easily slide down into it, provided it had been trained to do so.

Higgins squatted down instantly and began to slide.

It was the way he had entered when he followed Lightning Foot and the bogus doctor.

Miller was right behind him.

Ten feet from the surface they left daylight behind them.

The incline led them directly to a passageway under the rocks.

As they were sliding along, Higgins suddenly grabbed his friend by the shoulder.

"Now, then! Stop, old man! Dig your heels in hard. Here's the roof of the den! If we keep on sliding we'll land in the stable."

They both came to a halt at a narrow crevice under rock.

By crawling on their hands and knees they left the cline for a level.

There were rocks above and below.

Those above were uneven, and there were frequent air holes between them.

The two detectives crept close together.

They realized that theirs was a perilous undertaking.

A whiff of smoke suddenly greeted their nostrils.

It turned in a sort of current just a little distance before them.

An occasional beam of light stole between the stones, but beyond this the space between the two roofs was in darkness.

Avoiding the smoky current, the two detectives rept on.

They were determined to persevere until they reached the chimney.

The current of air acted well.

It carried the smoke on and on through the gutter of stones, only letting out a thin puff here and there at intervals.

In this way it had entirely escaped observation.

"The robbers had fixed the place cleverly," whispered Higgins, as he crept on.

Miller did not reply.

He had eluded the line of smoke, and was creeping steadily forward.

Not twenty feet before him rose the low, jagged stones of the chimney.

CHAPTER X.

DESPERATE CHANCES.

By lying flat upon the rocks the detectives could hear sounds beneath them.

The smoke was still too thick for them to peer down the low chimney.

The odor of roast venison came up to them at intervals.

It showed them that the outlaws were cooking their dinner.

They waited patiently for an hour. There was nothing else to be done. They knew only too well that all other entrances to the den would be guarded.

It was a mystery to Miller why the outlaw had not put some one to guard the chimney. The only reason that he could think of for his not doing so was that he was short of men. No doubt he needed all he had left to act as a bodyguard for him.

The thought was a pleasant one and inspired the detective with hope.

But it was doomed to a sudden death.

In less than ten minutes after he had located the chimney he heard some one creeping along the roof of the den behind him.

"A sentinel!" whispered Higgins. "Lie low, Miller, and don't breathe!"

The smoke was between them and it was growing thicker and thicker.

The man who was spying started coughing and then cursed like a tartar.

"Hang ther smoke! Jess kin do his own snoopin' ef he's afeared," said a low voice. "Ther man is crazy ter

think every sneakin' detective could find thet thar chimney!"

"Perticklarly when ther stun is in place," said another voice. "How ther deuce does he reck'n every one is goin' ter git in hyar les' he kin climb like er cater-mount?"

"Jess hez got ther devil in him erbout now! He's afeared of thet thar gold mine er slippin thro' his fingers."

"As ef he could make ther colonel give up! Why, thet thar old sinner would roast erlive an' never show ther white feather! An' ther gal hez got his grit! Ther cap'n himse'f is er gittin' stuck on her!"

"Much good'll it do him! But we'd better be er gettin' back! I'm as hungry as er b'ar an' thet thar venison smells hunky!"

"Whar ther devil do you s'pose Pete an' ther hump-back air all this time?"

"Ther devil only knows! They may be er lyin' low in ther woods fer some reason or another."

"It makes two less fer grub. Thet thar's all I'm er thinkin'."

A hoarse laugh fallowed.

Then the footsteps retreated.

The outlaw's spies had been too hungry to do their full duty.

Higgins put his lips close to Miller's ear.

"You see it is just as I told you. They spring up like mushrooms. Kill off s x at night and there'll be a dozen in the morning."

"It certainly looks so. Those two were new. I thought at first that one was Bink, the Terrier."

"The colonel is still alive, it seems."

"Yes. Thank God for that! I only hope he'll hold out and that we'll be able to save him."

"The case looks hopeless now. We have only these old muskets."

"We've got to save him! There must be some way to do it! But look, Higgins, don't you think the smoke is thinning a little?"

"Yes. The fire is dying out. They are evidently eating their dinner."

The detectives listened.

The smoke wreaths, as they rose from the chimney, were growing lighter and lighter.

A hoarse shout of laughter came up to them after a time.

There were a few weak puffs of smoke, then it ceased altogether.

Miller rose to his knees and crept to the chimney.

He took one quick glance. Nothing rewarded his effort. He could see only a portion of the stone floor and the dying embers.

Higgins crept to the other side. The light from the lanterns down below were in his favor.

He saw a form stretched out upon one of the skins.

He knew at once that it was not an outlaw.

Miller crept around and looked down once more.

Then he ground his teeth with rage. He understood the bandit's manner. He had not forgotten the shot down the chimney, and, for fear that it might be repeated, he had moved the colonel nearer to the fireplace. His body was the only target presented to a person who attempted to make another shot from that location.

The detective scanned the face of the brave man eagerly.

As the light from the lantern shone on it, he could see that it was still calm and composed, but the color was ghastly.

No doubt they had tortured him, to make him sign the deed to his property.

Jesse James might have known better. He would never secure it by those methods.

As the detectives listened, the laughter below grew louder and louder. The ruffians were evidently washing down their meal with copious draughts of liquor.

"That will be about all that is needed to——"

A sudden noise below cut short his sentence.

There was a shuffling of many feet on the rocky floor. Then the voice of Jesse James came up through the cavern.

"That'll do, Bink! You've had rum enough," he roared. "Do you want to get inflammation in your wound, and be laid up for us to doctor!"

"Let him alone, Jess. He's all right! You don't need him to-night, anyway! Better let him stay with the Torment, and guard the prisoners," answered his brother.

"I don't want any drunken guards! Besides, I ain't sure I can spare him! Just look at the men I have lost in the last two days! Curse those whelps, the detectives! They've crippled me like thunder!"

"Still, there's enough of us for the job to-night! It don't take an army to hold up a stagecoach."

"It will take six, and there are only five of us all told, unless Pete and the humpback return. What in blazes is keeping them?"

"I'll gamble I know! The detectives have pounced on 'em! I told you we'd better go back the way we went in! We most likely passed those two coyotes somewhere in the cavern!"

"Then why didn't they shoot us if that is the case? I don't believe we passed 'em! I think they were ahead of us!"

"Funny we didn't see their tracks then, Jess, when we came out of the cavern."

A growl was the only answer.

"That means that the colonel and his daughter are to be left here to-night, while the stagecoach is being held up," whispered Higgins to Miller. Miller nodded his head.

"With Bink and the wolf to guard them. We'll make short work of that couple. The thing for us to do is to lie low and wait, Higgins."

"I suppose it is."

They laid down flat upon the roof again for another hour.

By that time the smoke had died out completely.

It was still as dark as ever, but the air was better.

"Suppose they discover that the stone is not in place," whispered Higgins, finally.

"It will mean that they will get suspicious and come back to look for us. We should have gone before and tried to close the thing, old fellow."

"It will not be easy to climb out of this hole."

"No, that's so! Come to think of it, I don't believe we can do it."

"I think it is only used to come in by. There isn't a horse in the world that could even shin up that incline."

"I guess you are right, still the stone will betray us if

they happen to discover it. Now, how do you suppose they fix the thing, anyway?"

"There must be some device."

"But how will we find it?"

"Heaven only knows! I'll go and investigate."

"Be careful, Miller. A noise will be fatal."

"I won't make a sound."

The detective crept away softly.

Higgins put his eye to the chimney.

All was quiet below.

He was rewarded only by another glimpse of the colonel.

The brave man was still chained to a stake.

He was not moving a muscle. Apparently the rest of the outlaws were sleeping.

"Blessed if I don't think the man is a fool! I'd slip over the property and get my liberty," muttered the detective.

A soft scratching on the roof just behind him startled him.

He laid down flat upon his face.

The scratching continued.

Then the sound of hoarse voices began rising through the chimney.

He could hear the outlaws below shouting to each other.

The scratching ceased.

A moment later he heard soft footfalls.

A wild beast of some kind was coming toward him over the bowlders.

At the same time he heard the voice of Jesse James distinctly.

He was calling to his brother:

"Look for Torment, Frank! The beast is loose! Get a lead on the brute before she scares the wits out of the horses!"

Higgins held his breath.

He knew now what was approaching.

He wheeled around slowly without rising, so that he could face the creature.

Then he felt in his belt for a knife.

He had forgotten that he had none.

His only weapon of defense was the clumsy musket.

The report of a gun would betray his presence to the outlaws, yet he could already see the dim outline of the creature.

He turned the heavy gun in his hands, grasping the muzzle tightly.

As the hideous beast crept nearer, he rose on one knee and waited.

There was not a sign of Miller.

He must fight his battle unaided.

A low groan from the brute showed that she had spied him.

Higgins waited a second longer.

Then the rifle butt descended.

It took the brute squarely between the eyes and straightened her out in a jiffy.

At that sound, Miller came creeping back from his tour of inspection.

"It's no use, Higgins! I can't find the thing—he began.

Higgins crept to meet him, and explained what had happened.

"That means that a search will be started for the brute, and we will be discovered," Miller said, quickly. "We had better hide ourselves, Higgins! There's no use staying near the carcass."

They slunk into the crevices between the rocks and waited.

Hour after hour passed in tiresome suspense.

There was not a sound of any one coming.

Miller crept back to the chimney and listened.

He was in time to hear Jesse James deliver an order.

"Let the beast go, boys! She'll come back when she gets ready. There's no better picking in the mountains than she gets right here. Just see to it, you rascals, that she don't get at the heels of the horses."

"She won't do that, Jess! The Terrier is guarding the stable," was Frank's answer.

"Then I'm off for a ride. I'll meet you at the Quicksands at ten-thirty," said the outlaw. "You can tie the girl to a stake if she makes any bother."

"I'll take care of her, never fear," was the answer.

Then all was silent below.

There was no one left in the room beneath them except the brave old colonel, who still sat like a statue.

The two detectives were nonplused.

If they could have scrutinized the room below, they could have laid their plans better.

Who was in the den besides the old colonel?

Was his daughter there, and were the two of them guarded?

These were questions that they must answer before they could act, but how to answer them was in itself a question.

The detectives knew instinctively that darkness had fallen.

It would soon be time for the robbers to leave the ravine and start on their long ride to the spot called the Quicksands.

They took turns in placing their ears at the chimney.

At last Miller felt certain that he could hear departing hoof-beats.

They consulted again.

All must be risked, and at once.

It would be about a twenty-minute job to hold up the stagecoach.

That would mean that the robbers would be back with their booty by one o'clock.

The detectives hoped to have the colonel and his daughter safely hidden by that time.

Their plans were all laid when they again went to the chimney.

Miller listened intently.

Strange sounds were coming up to him.

First came a bar of some wild song, then a burst of maudlin laughter.

He understood in a minute.

Bink, the Terrier, was getting drunk.

Jesse James had neglected to take his flask away from him.

What would be the result?

Miller grew radiant with hope as he listened.

Five minutes later he vaulted over the low chimney and dropped into the room below.

He landed on the hot stones within three feet of the colonel.

A word of warning escaped his lips, but it was not needed.

The colonel had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion. His daughter lay like one dead, on a bearskin ten feet away from him.

Miller glanced around.

Bink was staggering toward him.

His finger was on the trigger of his revolver.

The detective raised his musket.

A thunderous report rang through the cavern.

Bink dropped like a log.

Miss Hart sprang to her feet and shrieked with terror.

Colonel Hart opened his eyes.

He recognized Miller in an instant.

The next moment he was doing what he could to help the brave fellow loosen his shackles.

"Now, then, for the mountains!" cried Miller, as Higgins dropped down behind them and quickly appropriated Bunk's revolver.

They crept slowly through the den, picking up a few stray articles of clothing as they went.

There were four horses left in the rude stable.

Three of them were the colonel's own, and they greeted him with neighs of pleasure.

As Higgins still had his musket, he handed the colonel the revolver.

Miller led the way through the rocky defile on a spirited animal.

It had been ridden by the outlaws, and knew the way out of the ravine, but it remained to be seen whether the other animals could follow it up the precipitous bank.

He trembled for the safety of the girl he loved; yet he knew her to be a fearless rider.

The moon came out gloriously as they reached the ascent.

It aided them all in their perilous undertaking.

When they were safely in the trail, Miller reined close to Miss Hart's side.

He was too happy to speak, but he could see that the young girl understood him.

Five minutes later they were headed toward Golden City.

Miller was still in the lead, but the girl he loved was close behind him and bearing up bravely.

It was desperate chances, indeed, that the young man had taken, but he felt that it would take more than Jesse James and his whole band to capture him now.

CHAPTER XI.

JESSE JAMES IN DISGUISE.

"Stop! We are losing the trail!"

It was Colonel Hart who spoke.

Miller checked his horse at once and turned in his saddle.

"There should be a clump of stunted birches to the right, and a ridge of cedars on the extreme left! We've taken the wrong trail!" went on the colonel.

Miller peered around.

The mountains were as clear as daylight.

He could not understand how they could have made such a blunder.

"There's Roaring Water Pike in the west," he began, thoughtfully.

The sound of a horse's hoofs behind them ended the conversation.

Higgins raised his musket to his shoulder.

The hoof-beats grew louder.

"Halt! Who comes there?" Miller called lustily.

A crack of a pistol answered him. As the bullet whistled by his ear he yelled again:

"Hold your fire, you sinner, till you find out whether we are friends or foes! What the devil do you mean by popping at strangers?"

The horseman had halted behind a convenient thicket.

As the detective spoke he answered promptly:

"Who be ye, anyway? I'm er poor lone man thet ain't got nothin' fer no one. 'Tain't no use holdin' me up, ef you be er pack uv cutthroats."

"Which we don't happen to be, stranger," responded Higgins. "We are four travelers on our way to Golden City."

The horseman came out from behind the thicket.

He was a curious-looking fellow. His face was covered by a beard that would have done credit to a patriarch.

As he rode he bent forward till his nose almost touched the pommel of his saddle.

"On ther way ter Golden City, be yer?" he repeated, in a cracked voice. "Waal, yer must be strangers hyar abouts ter think yer on thet thar trail! Yer've missed yer bearin's som'er's an' air makin' straight fer ther Quicksands."

"Jerusalem! You don't mean it!" exclaimed Higgins, anxiously.

"That's exactly what I thought! I don't see how we did it," spoke up the colonel.

Miller said nothing.

He was staring at the stranger's horse.

The beast was as black as tar instead of a roan, yet every curve of its body was the exact counterpart of Fleetwind.

"Can you put us on the right trail, friend?" asked Higgins, politely.

"If you can, we will pay you well for it when we reach Golden City," went on the colonel. "I am Colonel Hart, and I have just escaped from Jesse James and his gang of cutthroats."

"Ther devil, yer say! Wall, thet thar is interestin'," said the fellow, at the same time jerking his horse down to the path with a vigorous movement.

Higgins rode forward a few paces, and, in an instant, the coal-black horse reared and snorted violently.

"Whoa! Down, yer brute!" yelled the old fellow, excitedly.

His voice seemed lost upon the beast, but he still stuck to the saddle.

Miller reined his mount a little nearer.

There was a neigh of pleasure. It was plain as day that the two horses recognized each other. He rode closer to the stranger, fingering his musket as he went.

When he was exactly abreast he bent forward and looked sharply at the fellow.

"What the deuce are you doing with that horse?" asked, sharply. "Own up, you greaser! You stole that creature!"

A curious chuckle came from the bearded lips, then the fellow pulled his hat lower over his eyes and peered back at the detective.

"Strikes me yer mighty familiar with ther bank-king's mount, friend," he said, shrewdly. "I thought you said yer was honest men on ther way ter Golden City."

"That does not mean that we don't know that horse," retorted Miller. "Why, Fleetwind is almost is well known as his master! You can't fool any one who ever saw that beast by putting a coat of paint on him!"

The fellow chuckled again.

He had plenty of nerve for the occasion.

Knowing that every one despised Jesse James, he did not scruple to tell his secret.

"Ther truth is, friends, I stole ther beast," he said, with another chuckle. "I wuz trampin' across ther mountains when I come ercross him tied ter a saplin'. 'Twarn't natur ter trudge on an' leave er good piece er hoss feller behind me, so I jest took him erlong. Ther devil on knows that his master wuz er doin' when I stole him."

The detectives stared at each other.

The man's story was plausible.

There were plenty of horse-thieves in the mountains.

The question was, how did Jesse James come to be so stupid as to allow his horse to be stolen exactly when he needed him.

While the stranger talked, Higgins still fingered his musket.

He had seen no sign of weapons about the fellow, but he had not forgotten that pistol shot.

"Yer don't blame me fer takin' ther beast, do yer?" went on the fellow. "Hang ther critter! I'd part with her cheap! I can't stick ter her much longer!"

As he spoke the horse reared and then made a dash ahead.

It looked as if his rider would be thrown any second. "Whoa, there! whoa! Stand still!" shrieked the fellow.

Fleetwind paid no attention.

He was growing wilder and wilder.

"The man will be killed!" cried Miss Hart.

The colonel dashed ahead.

As he did so Fleetwind reared again. The next instant he made a leap forward, completely clearing the thicket.

Horse and rider were out of sight of the group in a second.

As they listened eagerly a mocking laugh came back to them.

"Great Scott! It was Jesse James himself! After him, Miller!" shouted Higgins, excitedly.

A pistol shot warned him.

Looking up the bluff they saw horse and rider.

He had put a hundred rods between them in the space of a minute.

The outlaw was out of range.

He was waving his hat gayly.

As he stood outlined against the sky he seemed more a demon than mortal.

The detectives ground their teeth.

It was a bitter disappointment.

The outlaw had been within the range of two loaded muskets, yet he had deceived them by his clever acting.

"Now, what will he do?" asked Miss Hart, nervously.

"Of course, he will entrap us some way before we reach Golden City."

"If we could only find the trail," began the colonel.

Miller had ridden back a few rods on the lookout for danger.

He was afraid other horsemen might be hiding behind the thicket.

"We must either find the trail or lose ourselves completely," said Higgins, decidedly. "No doubt, Jess will set his spies after us as soon as he is able."

"Which means that we will all be shot down like dogs," said Colonel Hart, savagely, "for, of course, Jess only waited to make sure of our identity before laying his plans to recapture us."

"Yes. He will never allow us to reach Golden City now," said Miller. "We know too much about his den in the Black Pit Ravine. I have heard that no one ever visited that spot as a prisoner and lived to describe it."

"Oh, Mr. Miller! How horrible! I cannot believe it!" cried Dora.

Miller hastened to her side.

He had forgotten her for a moment.

"We shall be the exceptions," he murmured, softly. "I swear it, Dora! You shall not be harmed by that ruffian!"

Dora Hart leaned over in her saddle and gave him a thrilling glance in the moonlight.

At the same time there came a warning cry from Higgins.

The detective had been riding here and there among the bushes on the lookout for enemies.

Suddenly, after standing a minute, he discovered that his horse's feet were sinking in a claylike substance.

"Quick! We must get out of this! We are nearing the Quicksands!" he cried, sharply. "Go straight ahead, Miller. It is our only course! Jesse James is behind and the Quicksands are at the left. By keeping straight ahead we may strike the road to Lead City and get out of this forsaken locality."

"I doubt it, but, as you say, there is no choice," said Colonel Hart, urging his horse forward.

"Look! There he is now!" cried Miss Hart, as she glanced back over her saddle.

The others turned.

The horse and rider were once more outlined clearly upon the bluff.

With his right arm Jesse James seemed to be pointing out their direction to three companions whose figures suddenly appeared beside him.

"It is a race with death, daughter, but we will face it bravely," said the colonel, quietly.

Miss Hart grasped her bridle reins firmly in her hands. Her eyes rested upon Miller.

"It must be eleven o'clock," said the detective, glancing at the moon, "and that is the time they expect the stage from Lead City to reach the Quicksands. If they do that job first, it will give us a start. Now, then, for a search for that road!"

They dashed off together.

At the same time, the three horsemen vanished from the bluff.

They had spied a black spot on the moonlit hills, and knew it was the stagecoach.

The lumbering old vehicle was moving like a snail.

They knew exactly where to meet it.

Jesse James roared out his orders as they left the crest of the hill.

"Keep to the left, boys, until we meet the stage. It will take ten minutes to do that job, then we can come back by the lower trail and make it hot for the detectives."

"You say they are stranded, Jess!"

"Yes. They've lost their bearings completely. We can meet them in the gully when we are done at the Quicksands."

"That is, if we don't have more trouble than we're lookin' fer, Jess!"

"We will have no trouble! Keep your wits about you!" was the outlaw's answer.

Over bushes and rocks bounded the gallant steeds.

Jesse James had discarded his long whiskers now and sat erect in his saddle.

Nearer and nearer they came to the treacherous spot of sand which had once been the bed of a mighty river.

CHAPTER XII.

BAFFLED.

The road to Lead City wound close by this dried stream, but the engulfing sands did not encroach upon its territory.

It stretched to the right in spots, and was dangerous in wet seasons.

The river bed itself was like a fawning monster.

It stretched out a velvety surface that sucked in even huge boulders greedily.

When Jesse James reached the edge of the road, he called his men together. There were only four, but they completely blocked the narrow space. The stage would be forced to stop.

It could not pass them.

The only alternative would be a mad attempt to drive through the Quicksand.

"Now, then, our prisoners are behind us once more," said the king of bandits. "With those horses of the colonel's they will be easily overhauled. Put on your masks, men, and obey my orders. When we have done our work we will take our pleasure!"

"Ay! That we will! And you all know what that means!" roared Frank James. "It means that if Jess makes a lucky haul on the coach, he will give you a whack at the detectives!"

A howl of laughter greeted this jest. Then the two leaders of the stagecoach appeared over the crest of the hill.

They snorted and plunged when they saw the horsemen.

The driver rose from his seat and urged them forward with voice and whip.

Then, at a roar from Jesse James, he drew his pistol. It was shot out of his hands.

At the same time the leaders fell dead in their traces. A volley of shots rent the air.

The passengers inside of the stage began shrieking and cursing.

Crack! Crack! Crack! went their weapons.

The bandits waited until they were empty, contenting themselves with shooting down the horses.

As the brave driver reeled from his seat, Jesse James rode up to the door of the coach.

His voice rang out like a bugle, "Hand over your valuables!"

Not one dared refuse.

Money and jewelry were passed over to him.

With the gold coin which the stage was carrying, he secured over ten thousand dollars.

It had taken but ten minutes, exactly, as he reckoned.

Then, leaving the frightened passengers with a polite "good-night," he dashed after his escaping prisoners, his three companions having hard work to keep up with their imperious leader.

They had turned from the trail and had taken a short cut over the wildest possible country.

In one spot they were obliged to dash over treacherous ground in order to follow the commands of the greatest of robbers.

"They can't have passed the fork of the trail!" roared the bandit king. "On, faster, boys! We'll head off the rascals!"

Fleetwind bounded over the rocks and bushes as lightly as a feather.

She seemed possessed by the same power as her master. Frank James was scanning the distant hills with his eagle vision.

Every bluff and ridge was outlined clearly in the moonlight.

Suddenly a yell of delight issued from his lips.

He rose in his stirrups and swung his hat excitedly.

"There they are, Jess! Just across the hills to the right of that big boulder! Five minutes more and we'll be ahead of them!"

"We'll divide our forces, then!" cried Jesse James without even looking behind him. "You and Powder Horn cross the gully to the right and come up behind 'em. By that means we can either capture them or force them into the Quicksand!"

"A good idea! Once get that pig-headed old duffer stuck tight in the mud and he'll give us a promise!"

"Which he'd never live to fulfill!" laughed Jesse James, as they parted. "Once get into that black maw and your doom is sealed!"

He spurred Fleetwind over a suspicious-looking spot as he spoke, and then looked behind to see if his man was following him.

Frank James had dashed off at right angles with the half-breed called "Powder Horn" close beside him.

Two more villainous mortals could not have been imagined, except their counterparts, Jesse James and his evil-eyed companion.

Keeping the four riders in sight, they fairly flew down the mountain.

Their victims were descending a low hill on the opposite side of a thickly-wooded gully.

If they were cut off from advancing or retreating, they would be forced to the middle course. They must make for the treacherous ground, which was yawning to receive them.

Of course, it was possible that they might know the country.

In this case they would stand their ground.

That would mean that the detectives would be shot

on like dogs, and the colonel and his daughter would recaptured.

Jesse James smiled with pleasure as he thought of the

He was determined that the colonel's claim should not through his fingers.

Suddenly he stopped short in his wild ride down the mountain side.

The four riders had disappeared in the space of a second.

An oath burst from the outlaw's lips.

He raised himself in his saddle.

"Where did they go to, Hawk?" he asked of his companion.

The fellow beside him pulled up his steed.

He had eyes that could almost pierce the mountain wilders.

"They've seen us, cap'n, an' they're layin' low just under the ridge," he said, promptly. "Frank 'll flush 'em in er minute! He an' Powder Horn hev crossed ther' ally!"

"That will force them ahead! Come on!" cried Jesse, he urged his horse forward.

They dashed down the hill and were soon crossing the ally. The horses waded ankle deep in treacherous clay and threaded their way between rank bushes.

At last they gained the other side and dashed like wild creatures up the gentle slope of the rugged hills.

"He's scared 'em! They're ridin' fer ther lives!" called Hawk, who was gazing upward.

The crack of two revolvers echoed over the hills at his words.

They were followed by reports from two heavy muskets.

Then the snorting of frightened horses could be heard.

Jesse James fired his revolver straight up the mountain side to add to the clamor and show them that they were hemmed in upon every side.

The crashing in the bushes increased.

The riders were coming at a break-neck speed.

Down, down rushed the horses toward the underbrush of the gully.

Jesse James waited until he was sure of the direction of their flight, then, wheeling his fearless horse, he made chase after the riders.

Five minutes later they appeared upon the opposite bank.

The outlaw's plan had worked satisfactorily.

Frank James and Powder Horn joined the other two bandits.

They rode leisurely after their fleeing victims.

"Now, we've got 'em! The Quicksands are just ahead! Let 'em go, Frank! They're riding straight to their own destruction!"

As Jesse James spoke he pulled his horse in a little.

He was exulting now.

There seemed to be no escape for his victims.

"They're cussed fools to run, perticklarly when they're armed," laughed Powder Horn. "Ther's er chance fer 'em in fightin', but ther's none in the Quicksand!"

"We must keep the colonel out of it, if we can," said Jesse James, sternly. "Let the detective whelps sink if they want to! I've got other plans for the colonel and his daughter."

"They'll die together! It's just like 'em!" answered Frank James. "Mark my words, Jess, they'll welcome that grave in the sand rather than get back into your clutches."

"Then they can have it!" growled the outlaw.

"And a couple of millions will slip through your fingers!"

A curse was Jesse James' only comment.

He took a sharp look at the four fleeing riders, who were still visible at intervals, and then turned to his brother, angrily.

"I'll not lose it, by thunder! I'll make out the papers myself and transfer the claim! I know the colonel's handwriting and can imitate it! Once let me see him dead, and who is to dispute me!"

"Who will be your witnesses?"

Jesse James thought a minute.

A shout from Hawk interrupted his reflections.

"Look! They're in ther mire, cap'n! Ther leader ain't moved fer er minute! He's flounderin' like er good feller, but he's jest er sinkin' deeper!"

"Then we'd better hurry and see the fun!" laughed Jesse James.

With a word to Fleetwind he was soon in the lead of his partner. Before him stretched a fairly level tract which sank with a gradual slope to the treacherous bed of the vanished river.

It was only a mile or two from where the "hold-up" had taken place, and but for a fringe of birches the coach might have been plain to their vision.

Before them, in plain sight, were the four brave riders.

They were staking their last hope on crossing the Quicksands.

Once on the Lead City road they might have a chance with their pursuers or, at least, give them a race that would be a final effort.

Jesse James shouted at them derisively as he saw the four horses floundering in the mud.

Then he called his own party to a halt at a safe distance from the Quicksands.

The four riders were attempting to pass the river bed in single file. Colonel Hart was ahead.

He was followed closely by his daughter.

The outlaws smiled grimly as they watched the heroic efforts of the horses.

The noble steeds pulled their feet from the sucking soil and stepped as lightly as feathers.

Suddenly a hoarse cry emanated from the lips of Jesse James.

He gave a shout of fury and started forward.

"Quick! Around the trail, Hawk! The wretches are escaping!" he yelled. "There's one spot in those sands that a horse can cross, and hang me if the old colonel doesn't know it!"

It was something that had escaped his mind until that moment.

At the same moment two bullets from his revolver went speeding after the flying detectives.

Hawk put spurs to his horse, and Frank James followed suit.

Jesse was purple with rage at his own stupidity.

He had completely forgotten the narrow bridge across the Quicksands which had been made years before by daring horse thieves.

It was covered with the slimy soil now, but the depth was only a few inches.

If a horse picked its way, it could feel the firm tree trunks that formed the path over the mire.

A swerve of the body or a misstep would throw it over into a living grave.

As he thought of this, Jesse urged Fleetwind nearer and emptied his revolver at the fugitives.

At the last shot the rear horse in the little procession shivered and fell.

Higgins leaped lightly from his saddle to the back of the horse before him.

Another volley of shots was poured in their direction.

They whistled by their ears.

Powder Horn's weapon had spit them.

A moment later the brave horses cleared the narrow bridge.

The colonel had guided them safely.

They leaped forward like deer, and were out of the range of more bullets.

"Now run for it, colonel!" called out Miller, sharply. "Two of the fellows are out of the race altogether, and we have five minutes' start of the other two. If we can overtake the stagecoach, we may find some one to help us!"

Higgins looked back over his shoulder.

His horse had rolled over in the mire.

Already the treacherous sands were engulfing its body.

Fearing that it was not dead, he raised his musket and fired.

He could not bear to think of such a death for the faithful creature.

The last glimpse that the detectives had of the great

outlaw showed him gnashing his teeth in fury. He depended upon the Quicksands to wreak his vengeance but they only stood between him and his intended victim.

He dared not now test the passageway across the mire. It had been too greedy for its prey to bear a second tempting.

Five minutes later the colonel's party overhauled the coach and, after first scaring the passengers out of their wits, they succeeded in nerving them to an effort at protection.

Four men had gone on to Oreville in search of horses and of the eleven passengers that remained five were women.

Colonel Hart was recognized at once, and succeeded in inspiring them with courage.

A careful search resulted in the finding of several weapons and some ammunition.

Using the coach as a barricade, they manned it from all quarters, and as Frank James and Hawk galloped to a perfect volley was fired at them.

Hawk dropped from his saddle.

Frank James did not wait to see if he was dead.

He put spurs to his charger and galloped back to meet his brother.

The passengers in the stagecoach kept guard for many hours, but nothing more was seen of the outlaws.

They had abandoned the chase.

It was a trait in the character of Jesse James to always do what was least expected of him.

"Possibly he is content with the gold that he has stolen for the present," the colonel said to Miller. "He will wait until I have mined more, and then I will hear from him again."

"You will be a marked man from this time forth, fear," was the answer. "Jesse James has never yet been known to give up an undertaking."

At last the men arrived, bringing the fresh relay of horses, and the lumbering old coach was once more started on its journey.

The faithful driver was given a grave upon the mountains, but Hawk was left to the mercy of his companion.

It was believed by them all that the half-breed was dead, but the stagecoach had hardly disappeared before he revived with alacrity and crept away.

When Colonel Hart and his daughter arrived at the ranch, the two detectives were still with them.

Jesse James had done nothing more toward stealing the gold mine, but they lived in daily fear of some manifestation of his intention.

Dora and Miller were married, and the detective gave up his profession altogether.

He had enough of hunting desperadoes, but he meant to be on hand to give the James boys a hot reception should they ever visit Golden City.

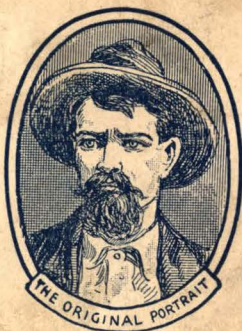
Higgins reported to Pinkerton, and was reinforced by two more men, but their efforts to capture the noted bandit cannot be recounted in this story.

All over the Black Hills were scattered monuments to the James boys' cruelty.

THE END.

Next week's JESSE JAMES STORIES (No. 7) will contain "Jesse James, Rube Burrows & Co.—A Thrilling Story of Missouri," describing some of the most desperate undertakings of the noted Missouri outlaw.

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